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BY

ROBERT J. GRIFFITHS, LL.D.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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TO HIS GRACE
THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON, K.G.,
THIS WORK IS DEDICATED,
BY HIS DEVOTED SERVANT,
THE AUTHOR.

M. Langhorne 29 Apr. 1853

New Ips Bay 18 May 53 Chaslett - 2v.

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IN SECRET PLACES.

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF THE WORLD.

FAR away from our great cities and towns, from the ever-flowing stream of earnest, toiling, anxious life, and beyond the reach of the great thoroughfares of the kingdom, is the village where our story opens. It is buried from sight amidst the Welsh mountains, and the dull, monotonous existence of its inhabitants is never disturbed, except perchance by some casual visitor bent on exploring the wild and unknown regions of the interior of the Principality.

The village in question is concealed from

view on one side by a range of hills, which form a part of the Welsh mountain region—bleak, sterile, and desolate hills—where the inhabitants are but few and very poor, and where the footsteps of man are but seldom to be traced. Here and there a curling wreath of blue smoke denotes the presence of a humble mud-built cottage, and in such spots the land is cultivated in a rude, barbarous manner, which shows plainly that the dwellers upon these hills are content to follow still in the steps of their forefathers, and have not yet felt the influence of the ever-advancing tide of progress. Theirs is a sleepy, indolent, and poverty-stricken mode of life, and no aspirations for a more active state of existence ever ruffle the sluggish calm of their long unending siesta.

To the north and south the country is more level, and in these directions the roads leading to far-distant towns stretch away, until they are lost to view. On the west is the Cardigan Bay, with its sparkling waters,

sometimes placid and smiling, reflecting the golden light of the setting summer sun ; at other times rolling and tumbling angrily about in their huge bed, when dashed into fury by the rude blasts of winter.

The village of Glynarth was about two miles distant from the sea, and the road which led down to the shore passed through a strikingly beautiful glen or valley. It was narrow and steep, as if it had been cut out of the surrounding hills by the action of the sea. Standing upon the summit of the hill upon which the village had been erected, a goodly prospect presented itself to the eye as one looked towards the bay. A narrow uneven road went winding down one side of the valley—in fact, it might almost be said to run along the side of the hill which formed one of its boundaries,—and on either side, to the north and south, arose the hills, covered with heath and mountain verdure. In this glen, or *glyn*, as the natives called it, the land was better cultivated than on the distant hills to the east, although the people

lived in the same simple, primitive fashion. Looking down into the valley, you could only detect the presence of houses by the white chimney-tops, for they were mostly built in deep hollows, and their privacy further secured by surrounding them with trees, which were always considerably higher than the cottages themselves. Thus they were completely shrouded from view—they were deep, quiet retreats, where one might pass a lifetime, if one chose, in listening to the bleating of sheep and the melancholy sighing of the wind in the foliage. There was a bright sparkling stream of water flowing through the glen, and its silvery rippling murmur was very distinct in the midst of the peaceful calm which generally pervaded the place. Hills, valley, and streamlet—rocks, trees, and fields of waving corn—it was pleasant to contemplate such a scene on a still summer's afternoon, when the sun was high in the heavens and the sea slumbering like a giant in repose; when the eye rested upon nothing but what was radiantly,

gloriously beautiful, and when nothing was present to disturb the harmony of nature.

At the end of the valley, upon the sea-shore, was a venerable old church, hoary with the weight of gathering years, where hundreds of former dwellers in the valley slept their last long sleep—truly a place where—

“The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep ;”

and the affections of those who were left behind clung with loving tenderness to the dingy bare old edifice. Standing on the summit of one of the hills on a sunny day, how very still the valley is ! Not a sign of life is visible anywhere, except the birds, which warble merrily in the pure atmosphere ; not a human being is to be seen ; a great hush has fallen upon the landscape, and the only other sound is the waving of the corn, which bends beneath the gentle sea-breeze, as if talking to itself in weird melancholy tones. Peace, perfect peace, dwells around ; and often do the weary

aching brains and anxious minds of wanderers from the great cities envy the people who live and die contentedly and placidly in this sylvan retreat, buried from the cares and trials of a world of which they know little or nothing. How natural it is to suppose that human passions never exist in such fair and lovely spots !

Glynarth was not a large village. Its inhabitants were probably not more than three or four hundred, but it was greatly superior to most Welsh villages. The beauty of the surrounding neighbourhood, and its perfect privacy, attracted a few people of good position, who had built some neat villa residences close to the village. In time these villas passed into the hands of speculators, who let them for fixed periods to people who wished for a temporary change of scene and relaxation. In one of them a gentleman, named Frederick Danvers, resided. He was a young man, about twenty-eight years of age, had studied in Scotland, and had travelled through the

greater part of Europe and the United States. In his youth he had been very poor, and had worked hard in a Manchester counting-house ; and his present wealth was not obtained until he was twenty-three years of age, when an uncle, dying, left him all his property. Frederick spoke French and Spanish with perfect ease, and he had fairly mastered colloquial Welsh also.

He was a good-looking, although not a handsome man. His hair was black, and his eyes were of the same hue—deep, penetrating eyes they were, which betokened a powerfully observant mind and a habit of serious, thoughtful contemplation. He was tall and slender, and his face was very thin and pale—in fact, he had a studious, sedentary appearance, which indicated plainly that he was not in strong health.

There was also the clergyman of the parish, a young man, named Campbell, who had only just been appointed to this his first living. He was a bachelor, and had succeeded in escaping the innumerable

matrimonial snares which had been set for him by enterprising young ladies, to whom a curate was a rare prize. In fact, every young man whose parents could afford to give him a tolerable education, was sent into the Church; and there were many instances of farmers who made all their sons clergymen, even though they themselves were Dissenters. As the profession was held in such high esteem, the girl who secured a clergyman of any kind was considered a very fortunate creature; and Mr. Campbell might have been married a dozen times over if he chose; but as he happened to be a High Churchman, he had strong views regarding the celibacy of the clergy. He was not a highly educated man, being the son of a well-to-do farmer, and educated in a small Welsh college, and he was extremely narrow-minded. To him the world in general was in a very unsatisfactory condition; nor would society, in his opinion, be in a healthy state until the clergyman was allowed to take the leading part in every

movement—political, social, and religious. His parishioners, however, differed from him in this and many other points; and consequently, although the services at Glynarth church were of a very florid and advanced character, the great majority of the people were Dissenters. He was not a vain nor a conceited young man, but he had a mistaken notion of his duty, and he strove to enforce his views, notwithstanding the violent opposition he called forth in doing so.

Away down the valley, half-way between the village and the ancient sea-side church, was a cosy, substantial-looking house, built beneath the projecting shadow of the hill. It was a two-storied house, with a small flower-garden in front; and between that and the road was a court-yard, overgrown with grass, in which two straw-thatched cottages stood, inhabited by ancient dames who had known the family for a longer period than some of its members would care to be reminded of. These habitations were,

in truth, of the rudest kind ; and the house itself would have been greatly improved in its appearance if they had been demolished ; but during the lives of their present occupants they were safe from sacrilegious hands. Many farm-houses around had appendages of this kind—perhaps a lingering remnant of the old feudal system.

The residents in this place were only two in number, a brother and sister, named Edward and Annie Hughes. They were orphans, for their father died a short time before, and their mother had drawn disgrace and infamy upon their family. Whether she were alive or dead they knew not, and the sad story of her sin and shame was never referred to even by their gossiping neighbours, for Annie Hughes was a favourite with all, and no one would willingly cause her pain. Edward was a youth of nineteen at this time, and various schemes had been proposed for the purpose of establishing him in life, to none of which, however, did he pay much attention. He

was, in fact, an indolent, vicious lad, who loved to loiter all day in the village ale-houses, and associated with the lowest companions he could find. He had already acquired an unenviable notoriety throughout the whole country-side, and strange rumours were in circulation as to his wild, foolish conduct; but not many of his misdeeds reached his sister's ears, for the kind-hearted people endeavoured to shield her from as much pain as possible. Perhaps it would have been well if she had known the unpleasant truth! She thought so in after years.

Edward and his sister possessed jointly a small income, derived from land which their father had left them; but Annie saw clearly enough that this would be totally inadequate to dispense with the necessity of some occupation for her brother. What he was to do was a problem which severely puzzled every one connected with the youth.

Mr. Danvers had only recently arrived in Glynarth—at the time our story commences

he had not been there a month, and as his health was extremely weak and delicate, he had not been able to go out much, particularly as the weather happened to be wet and stormy, although it was in the month of September. He had taken a small furnished villa, which was to be let; and he brought his own servants, horses, and carriage from London. The change from the metropolis to the perfect serenity of Glynarth was very delightful to the pale, haggard invalid, and for the first month he did not indulge in any violent exercise.

One evening, however, the beauty of the autumn sunset tempted him to go out into the fields which surrounded his residence; and as he felt much stronger than usual, he determined upon taking a good long walk. He could either wander down the glen to the sea-shore, or he might betake himself to the hills which rose on the east; and he decided upon the latter course. He walked rapidly onwards, watching curiously the lengthening shadows upon the face of

the landscape, and enjoying the profound stillness which reigned around him, as only a convalescent can enjoy it. He went on thus for a distance of six or seven miles almost unconsciously, and then halted upon the summit of a hill to survey the scene.

North, south, east, or west there was not a living soul to be seen. He could easily imagine himself transported into the midst of a desert country, where human footsteps had never pressed the green sward, and where the voice of man had never been heard. Even the birds did not sing in this wild region, for there were no trees to shelter them, and they sought more congenial habitations than upon this desolate tableland. A heavy, black cloud had also settled over it, and Frederick saw with alarm that a storm was impending, and that it would probably be a severe one. He began to retrace his footsteps; but he had not gone far before the storm broke. The vivid lightning which accompanied it dazzled his eyes, and peal upon peal of thunder rang

through the awful silence with startling distinctness. To add to his discomfort, the rain began to descend in torrents, and in a very few minutes he was completely drenched.

He was accustomed, however, to take things in a calm, indifferent manner, and he was not seriously discomposed by his misfortune. He continued to peer curiously round, and at length fancied he saw in a small hollow a shed or hut of some kind.

“I daresay it is a cattle-shed, or sheep-fold, or something of that kind,” he thought; “if there is a decent roof, however, I shall bless the philanthropic individual who raised it. Here goes to try, anyhow. ‘Any port in a storm.’ ”

He leapt into the nearest field, and made his way through the wet marshy ground in the direction of the hut. Several times he sank over his boots in mud, and thought ruefully of what his London friends would say if they saw him in such a predicament. To make matters worse, he found that the

erection which had attracted his attention was only a dismantled sheepfold, into which the rain was streaming through numberless holes in the thatch. He was about to turn away, when he fancied that he saw a light further down in the hollow. He gazed intently in that direction, and as the darkness was momentarily becoming greater, the light was beaming more distinct. "This is a night of adventure," he muttered; "as I have come so far, I may as well go on. Perhaps that is an enchanted cottage, and I may have the honour of releasing some captive princess. The Welsh believe in that sort of thing, although this looks hardly the place for a decent dog, much less a fairy. It is dismal enough for Bluebeard himself."

Before setting out on this new quest, he drew a cigar from his case, and succeeded in lighting it; then grasping his walking-stick more firmly in his hand, he left the sheepfold. His way became wetter and muddier at every step, and wherever the

light proceeded from, it was clearly situated at the foot of the hill which rose on the other side of the hollow.

The descent was very rough and uneven, and he was several times on the point of stumbling; but he succeeded in reaching the spot from whence the light proceeded without any serious accident.

The rain still fell in torrents, and he was glad to find a strongly-built mud cottage or hut, for it only contained one room, and that was almost destitute of furniture. The window, through which the faint glimmer he had noticed came, was a very small one, but nevertheless there were several apertures in it, which had been stopped up with turf. Frederick would no doubt have surveyed the interior of the hut through the window, if he could have done so; but his approaching footsteps had been heard by the inmates, and the door was thrown open as he entered the yard.

Frederick could see a remarkably antiquated-looking old woman on the threshold;

and as he knew she would address him in Welsh, he hastened to speak first, in order to show her that he was not well acquainted with that language.

“Will you shelter a wet and weary traveller?” he asked, peeping into the hut as he spoke. “I have been caught in the storm, and seeing the light from your window, I made my way here.”

“Come in,” said the old woman, briefly, for her knowledge of English was very slight. Even to the remoter districts, however, of the Principality some scraps of colloquial English have penetrated, and this old woman was better off in this respect than most of the people who dwelt upon those hills.

He went in, and found himself in a very curious apartment. A small peat fire was burning upon the floor, and the smoke escaped through an aperture in the roof. The furniture consisted only of a table and a three-legged stool; but on the walls a number of mysterious objects were hung. Among them was an elaborately carved

horn, inscribed with queer, cabalistic hieroglyphics; a wooden board with movable slides, which Frederick conjectured was used for some kind of game; a number of flat stones, of various hues and shapes, and also bearing inscriptions, and other things, which he had no time to observe in the cursory glance he cast around, for there was another object present, who immediately attracted his attention.

It was a young and beautiful girl, apparently of not more than eighteen years of age. She was one of those persons, however, whose exact age it is difficult to assign, for there was an old look in her young face—an anxious, troubled expression that told of some lurking sorrow. Her hair was of a light brown hue, and streamed carelessly over her shoulders; her eyes were of a dark hazel colour, and her complexion unusually clear and transparent for a country girl; but her blooming, rosy cheeks, on the other hand, betokened her rustic origin. She was rather tall and slender—indeed, her profile

was classic, and almost perfect in its way. She wore a woven stuff dress, evidently of home manufacture; and a large shawl had been thrown aside upon her entrance, with which she had previously completely enveloped herself. Altogether he thought her to be wonderfully pretty, and consequently out of place in that miserable hovel; so that Frederick found himself conjecturing as to what her errand might be in that lone, desolate spot.

She was standing near the fire when he entered, and she turned to greet him. She was rather amused by the puzzled expression which was visible in his countenance as he glanced around, and it became more evident than ever when his gaze rested upon her.

“I was just thinking before I came in how delightful it would be to find a fairy princess languishing in captivity here,” he said, in an easy, gentlemanly way, which always impressed his auditors favourably, and gained their confidence almost immediately.

“I was not prepared to find my wish so nearly gratified.”

“Do I look so very like a captive?” she asked, in a half-shy, half-amused manner. “Even if I did, I am afraid you could not play the chivalrous knight in your wet clothes. It is difficult to be romantic when one is half-drowned and half-dead with cold, as you appear to be.”

Decidedly she was not one of the common herd, he thought. She could talk as well as girls accustomed to London drawing-rooms, and yet she was in this mud hut! It was certainly rather perplexing.

“You are a very matter-of-fact young lady,” he said, seating himself on the three-legged stool, which, however, betrayed several symptoms of weakness. Drawing it up, however, to the fire, whilst the old dame retreated to the other end of the apartment, and, folding her arms, seemed to become oblivious of everything around her, he tried to dry himself a little before the apology for a fire which flickered at his feet.

“I am afraid I could not guess what brought you to this primitive abode,” he remarked, hoping to draw her into some satisfactory explanation.

“Oh! that is easily explained,” she replied, leaning against the table; “the old woman who lives here was at one time my nurse, and as it was very fine this afternoon, I came to see her.”

“Oh! that is all, is it?” responded Frederick, with a shade of disappointment in his tone, for so commonplace an explanation did not harmonize with the romantic mood which had come upon him. “May I ask if you are one of the natives of Glynarth?”

She thought that he was rather an inquisitive young man, but he was so perfectly courteous and gentlemanly, that she could not refuse to answer him.

“Yes, I reside near the village,” she replied; “my name is Annie Hughes.”

“I have often heard of you,” he said, with a pleased smile, “and you must think

me excessively rude in occupying the only seat in this place, without offering it to you. Will you take the stool? ”

He had risen as he spoke, but she thankfully declined the offer. She distrusted its powers of endurance, even if she were disposed to sit down. She therefore declined the proffered seat; but his words had excited her curiosity.

“ You have heard my name? ” she asked; “ then you must be a resident in the village too? ”

“ Yes, I have been there for about a month,” he replied; “ my name is Danvers.”

Of course she had also heard of him, for he had been the chief topic of the village gossip and speculation ever since his arrival. He was commonly thought to be very rich, and although he lived in an unostentatious manner, this circumstance did not lessen the popular belief in his great resources. His servants had been carefully questioned and drawn out upon every possible occasion; but as they knew little or nothing concern-

ing their master's private affairs, they could throw no light on the subject. He was also considered to be an irreligious young man, for he only appeared in church on Sunday evenings, when there was no sermon, and Mr. Campbell read the latter part of the service in English for his special benefit. He came, however, to no other services, and Glynarth, like most Welsh villages, being an eminently religious place, so far as attendance upon a great number of interminable services can be regarded as religion, was highly shocked. He was pronounced by public opinion to be an "atheist," a person who was vaguely supposed to be very wicked, but no one knew exactly what the term meant. It was, however, a convenient one to apply to one who differed from their particular sect, and hence Annie had heard an unfavourable estimate of him.

"He looks very mild and inoffensive," she thought, as she recalled the term of reproach; "I am sure he is a perfect gentleman."

“What are you thinking of, Miss Hughes?” he asked, pleasantly, for she had been silent after the announcement of his name.

“I was trying to remember where I had heard your name before,” she replied; “and now that I think of it, I have heard it at least a hundred times, for your sayings and doings have been keenly canvassed in the village.”

“Have they, indeed?” he said, with an air of profound indifference, for he did not care to hear the local gossip about him; “it is a matter of no consequence to me. Has the storm passed away, I wonder? I should be glad to return home.”

Annie went to the door, and looked out. The rain had ceased to fall, and the heavy black clouds had dispersed. The moon was bursting through the sombre covering which concealed her beauty, and there were no traces of the so recent thunder and lightning. The storm had disappeared as suddenly as it came.

“It is quite fine now, Mr. Danvers,” she

said, returning to the fire, "and as you are going to Glynarth, I shall avail myself of your company to return home, if you will allow me."

"I shall be most happy and delighted," he replied; and he really felt more pleased than his careless polite manner indicated.

The girl began to prepare for her walk, and as she did so she spoke to the old woman in Welsh. Frederick could not quite understand what she said, but it was merely an explanation as to who the gentleman was who had come so suddenly upon them, and she told the old crone that she intended returning home with him.

The old woman made no reply, but came forward to the fire and seated herself upon the stool which Frederick had just vacated, and there began to mutter to herself, in a wild, incoherent manner, that made the Englishman rather uncomfortable.

"We will go now," Annie said, earnestly; "Nurse has one of her fits upon her, and she likes to be alone. Let us start."

They went out into the night, and Annie closed the door carefully behind them. As she had said, the rain had quite ceased, and the night was indeed remarkably fine. She pointed out to her companion a path leading to the high road, thus saving the unpleasantness of again crossing the marshy meadows. When they were fairly on the road, he offered her his arm, which, after a moment's hesitation, she accepted, and they walked homewards, engaged in lively conversation.

“How does the old woman manage to exist in that hut?” he asked. “Why does she not come to the village to live? It is altogether the most miserable place I ever saw; and where on earth does she sleep? for I saw nothing in the shape of a couch anywhere.”

“I really cannot tell you,” Annie replied; “she has refused over and over again to come to the village, because she belongs to a sect few in numbers now and rapidly disappearing, but which was once great and powerful. She is a believer in Druidism.”

Frederick thought only of the friendly society having that name—he did not imagine that the Druidical *religion* still existed.

“I was under the impression that men only were permitted to join the society,” he said; “I do not see, however, what that has to do with her residence up in the hills.”

Annie saw his mistake, and hastened to correct it.

“She is a believer in the ancient faith of the Druids—the *Derwyddon*, as we Cymry call them—and the adherents of that old-world superstition love nothing so much as solitude and freedom. They hate our mode of life—our civilization,—our beliefs—everything in fact that we prize most. Their religion could not exist amid the active life of the world, but it still lingers in the mountains. Nurse is one of these people.”

“What *do* they believe in, then?” asked Frederick, naturally curious to know something about this ancient faith, which he believed had been for ever exploded cen-

turies upon centuries back, but which he found still existing in the nineteenth century; “have they any places of worship—anything whatever in common with us?”

“I am really quite unable to give you any information on the subject,” she answered; “they are few in number, and their places of assembly are in the remotest mountain fastnesses. Unbelieving eyes never witness their mystic rites. Nurse disappears from her cottage for weeks together sometimes, and it is supposed that she goes to attend their meetings. Nothing more is known about them, or of her connection with them.”

“I should very much like to find out what their peculiar tenets are,” he said, regretting exceedingly that her information was so meagre; “in this age of used-up creeds and threadbare theories it would be refreshing to meet with a religion more ancient than Christianity itself—as it is said to be. Are there no ways and means of getting at these people?”

“I fear not,” she replied; “they are naturally very reticent as to their opinions, and it is quite possible to associate for months and years with Druids, or rather with believers in Druidism, without discovering the fact. It was a long time before it became generally known about Nurse; and even now no one except my brother and myself are allowed to enter the hut without her special permission. She was suspicious of you to-night.”

“How does she get her living?” he asked; “is it the custom in Wales for people to live upon nothing in solitary huts, without any furniture, like your old nurse?”

“You are too hard on the old woman, Mr. Danvers,” she said, laughingly; “she does not live upon nothing, as you put it, for there are several people who are very kind to her—Mrs. Montessor for instance. As for furniture, she has enough for her simple wants,—why should she encumber herself with any more?”

“Your argument is quite unanswerable,

my dear Miss Hughes," he replied, with mock gravity; "in fact I am so much struck by it, that when I get back to my place I intend disposing of all my personal property except what is absolutely necessary. It is a truly Spartan idea; but, by the way, who is Mrs. Montessor, whose name you mentioned?"

"You surely have not been in Glynarth a month without hearing of Mrs. Montessor?" she exclaimed, in real astonishment; "why, she is the lady of the manor—the ruling star in our local firmament. I am surprised at your ignorance."

"It is easily accounted for," he replied; "I have not been out very much since I came to Glynarth, and as I take no interest whatever in your local magnates, it was scarcely to be expected that I should have heard of her."

"Perhaps not; but I am surprised that she did not send you an invitation to the house," said Annie; "she is very kind to strangers."

“When they are young, tolerably well off, and not very bad-looking, I suppose,” he remarked, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice, that made his companion believe that he knew more about Mrs. Montessor than he cared to show. They arrived in Glynarth shortly afterwards, and Annie was about to wish her companion good-night, but he insisted upon walking down the valley with her, in order to see her safely home.

Frederick Danvers was unusually gracious that evening, and in fact he was rather surprised at his own conduct; accordingly, as he walked homewards alone, he took himself to task.

“I have been making an ass of myself, I fancy—talking in a charmingly confidential way with this mere chit of a country-girl. It looks as if I had wandered half over the world to fall in love with a girl in the wilderness at last. She is very pretty though, and extremely sensible; and I hate stupid women, who say yes or no to everything you start. She is not one of these people; in

fact, she is certainly cleverer than a dozen ordinary Welsh girls put together, so far as I can judge—that is why I like her ! ”

Having settled this matter to his own satisfaction, he returned home in a pleasant frame of mind, notwithstanding his wet garments.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. MONTRESSOR MAKES HER APPEAR-
ANCE.

THE following morning a footman in a faded suit of livery presented himself at the door of Glynarth Lodge, Mr. Danvers's residence, with an invitation from Mrs. Montressor to dinner that afternoon. Frederick was reading a newspaper, and smoking his after-breakfast cigar, when the highly glazed envelope, impressed with a gaudy monogram, was handed to him. He opened it, and read the invitation, while an amused smile played upon his features.

“This is rather odd,” he said aloud, for the servant had retired; “I have never seen the lady, and I am sure she has never seen

me, for she never comes to church at Glynarth, and yet she invites me 'to meet a few friends,' as if she had known me all her life. I suppose it is a fashion in this country, so I'll go; it may amuse me."

He was not far wrong in supposing that it was the fashion to patronize and take in hand every new-comer who might be likely to be of use to her. She, in common with every one else in Glynarth, had heard of the young Englishman and his reputed wealth, and she determined to make advances in order to gain his friendship. She was a Welshwoman by birth, and commenced life as a barmaid; but in this humble position she met Mr. Montessor, her late husband, and as he was at the time a foolish impulsive young man, he married her, and made her the mistress of Montessor House.

She had never been very handsome, even in her barmaid days, and as years rolled on, her good looks gradually disappeared, and her manners, which had always been un-

graceful, did not add to the charm of her society. She was a tall pale-faced woman, with a hard and even cruel expression on her countenance, which showed clearly enough that she was not in the habit of consulting other people's feelings and wishes. She had received a good education in her youth, and this was well-nigh the only redeeming trait in her character. She was never coarse, though often vulgar; and she contrived therefore to gather around her a tolerably wide circle of friends; for in a district like Glynarth the local aristocracy did not inquire too closely into the pedigrees of its members. The results might have been unpleasant if it had.

Her husband died many years before, and she had only one child, a daughter, named Maria. She was generally considered to be a handsome girl, and public opinion for once was not far wrong. She was taller than Annie Hughes, and her eyes and hair were of a deep black hue. Her features were regular, and her lips fresher and rosier

than most girls could boast of. She was naturally quick and intelligent, and with careful training might have been developed into a very amiable character; but under her mother's guidance she grew up with a mind bent upon nothing but scheming and intriguing. To make a good match, to secure a handsome settlement, and to become the ruling power in some small world of her own, were the great objects of her life.

The distance from the Lodge to Montessor House was not great, and Frederick presented himself before the entrance of the latter place precisely at the appointed hour of six. He was shown into the drawing-room, a quaint old-fashioned room with sombre, gloomy furniture, that belonged to a former period of time, and he had not been here long before the hostess came in to welcome him.

“Mr. Danvers, I believe?” she said, as she entered the room. “I am extremely obliged to you for accepting my invitation,

as Maria and myself have been quite longing to see you. Our society is limited in a place like this; and I assure you that you are an immense acquisition. So we got up a little dinner-party, quite in a homely way, and determined to ask you."

She was endeavouring to make a favourable impression upon him; but it was impossible to like her; the woman's cold, hard nature betrayed itself in every accent of her voice.

"There is only the Vicar, Mr. Edward Hughes, and ourselves. That is all."

"May I ask who Mr. Edward Hughes is?" he said, speaking for the first time, and asking the question merely for the purpose of obtaining some information respecting this young man's sister; for he was aware of the relationship between him and his own companion on the previous night. He wondered why *she* had not been asked.

"He is a young man who resides in the Glen," she replied, rather contemptuously, as her listener thought. "He and his sister

are orphans, and live together, as they have a little property. They are both of the common class; but you would be shocked if you knew what vulgar people we have to associate with in the country. It is quite frightful."

Frederick murmured his sympathy, and wondered whether it were this enforced association which made Mrs. Montessor herself so vulgar.

"Where did you come from last, Mr. Danvers?" she asked, seeing that he made no effort to continue the conversation; "and what, in the name of everything that is strange, made you select Glynarth as a place of residence?"

"I heard of it through a friend," he replied, "and being tired of wandering, I determined to settle down here for a while. I have just returned from Egypt."

"The climate does not seem to have done you much good," she said; although, as her ideas about geography were rather hazy, she was not quite sure as to whether

the climate were hot or cold. "I suppose it was very pleasant there?"

"Very," said Frederick, who was extremely bored by her conversation. And finding him determined not to exert himself, she left the room to seek her daughter, to whom she remarked that the stranger was proud and distant in his manners. That young lady, however, hoped to succeed better than her mother had done; for the first impression Maria produced was always more favourable than that caused by more intimate intercourse. The other guests arrived shortly afterwards, and a little before seven dinner was announced.

This was the first opportunity Mr. Campbell had had of meeting his new parishioner, and he was anxious to ascertain whether he were likely to prove a useful ally to the Church or not.

"I have been telling Mr. Danvers that he will be a very great acquisition to our circle here," remarked the hostess during the consumption of the soup; "Glynarth is so dull, is it not, Mr. Campbell?"

The Vicar certainly did not find it dull, for he was always engaged in deadly strife with his parishioners; and at that moment a lively contest was going on as to whether the clergyman had a right to be a guardian of the poor or not, and Glynarth was convulsed upon the question. He could hardly complain of its dulness.

“I am sure we are all very glad to see him,” he replied, rather awkwardly, for he did not like so direct an appeal on such a matter. “Mr. Danvers can do a great deal of good in the parish, if he chooses; the Church is so weak, and Dissent so strong, that every new ally is of the greatest value.”

“It would give me pleasure to be of service,” replied Frederick, gravely. “It has, however, been a rule with me—and a rule that I have never departed from—not to mix myself up with religious disputes at all. I do not like continual quarrels about religion, and I never take a side.”

“My dear sir, I do not see how you can

help yourself," said the Vicar, eagerly; "in England we are all nominally either Churchmen or Dissenters; and if you have no leaning towards Dissent, why not come forward to help the Church?"

"Simply because I am not satisfied that either side is right, or anything like it," he replied. "My own opinion is—and I have no doubt you will be greatly shocked when you hear it—that creeds and formularies are becoming obsolete, and that the Church must eventually succumb to the growing spirit of free trade in religion. Dissenters are fostering this tendency, without at all perceiving that the tide which will sweep the Establishment away will also ruin them in time and break up their corporate existence."

"Why do you think so?" asked the Vicar; "they have no emoluments to lose—no connection with the State to forfeit."

"True; but the spirit of destruction, which must necessarily be called forth in order to destroy the influence of the Church, cannot be lulled when that has been accom-

plished," he replied. "Men will ask themselves, if one sect of Christians are too narrow-minded and envious to allow another to enjoy revenues and advantages which can never by any possibility be transferred to another religious denomination, if this grasping mean spirit be so manifest in men who call themselves pious, what is the use of having religion at all? A system which produces such results cannot be a good one."

"Dissenters will assert that they are actuated by pure motives," observed Mr. Campbell. "They say that the union between Church and State is unscriptural, and by raising this cry avoid your difficulty, Mr. Danvers."

"By no means," he replied. "They will no doubt claim to be actuated by disinterested motives; but who will believe them? Not the great mass of the people, who know better, but who are generally ready to assist in destroying old institutions. It is always easier to pull down than to build up, and therefore, as a rule, we are readier to do the

former. If, however, these men get a taste for destroying religious institutions, then let Dissenters take care of themselves."

"I am sure you are a good Churchman, after all, Mr. Danvers," remarked Maria, who understood only that he was not very favourably disposed towards Dissenters, and therefore concluded that he must be an orthodox member of the Church.

"You are quite mistaken," he replied, with a grave smile; "I think Dissenters are acting foolishly and wrongly, but it does not follow that the Church is acting rightly; on the contrary, the present state of strife, which is rampant on both sides, is absolutely suicidal to the best interests of both parties. Fifty years hence there will be no Church and no Dissent; the spirit of anarchy which is being fostered now will swamp both; and in fact the world would be very much more peaceful if there were no religion in it—at all events, as we now understand the word."

Mrs. Montessor did not appreciate this

conversation, and she therefore endeavoured to change the subject.

“Mr. Danvers has but recently returned from Egypt,” she said, in a slightly louder voice than was necessary; “he has travelled more than recluses like ourselves are able to do, and I am longing to hear some of his adventures.”

The clergyman bowed, but made no reply. He did not like interruptions of this kind, and had no wish to change the subject, although he saw that the hostess was tired of it.

Frederick also understood the object of her remark, and was ready to act in accordance with it; for he did not think that a dinner-table was a suitable place for the discussion of religious topics.

“I daresay you have been in Egypt, Mr. Campbell,” he said; “it is becoming quite a favourite trip now.”

“No, I have never been out of Wales,” replied the Vicar. “We poor clergymen cannot afford expensive excursions. A

cheap Welsh watering-place for a fortnight or three weeks every summer is as much as we can indulge in. I have often wished, however, to travel—especially in places mentioned in the Bible.”

“I presume you have been in the Holy Land, Mr. Danvers?” remarked Mrs. Montessor, endeavouring to draw him out.

“Yes, I visited it two years ago,” he replied. “I cannot say I enjoyed it very much. I was unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of a series of incompetent guides, and came away with a very poor opinion of everybody I saw there.”

“Civilization is at a very low ebb there, I believe?” observed the Vicar.

“Yes; what people usually call civilization,” he answered; “they have none of it. What we call civilization is merely the art of concealing the natural ferocity and vileness of our nature by an artificial gloss; the inclination and tendencies are just the same as before, but civilization holds them in check by a system of terrors, ranging from

the gallows to the treadmill. In Egypt and Palestine they plunder the traveller, but they do it openly enough, and you can always indulge in the luxury of shooting the thief."

The Vicar was greatly interested in a man who showed more intellectual activity than any one he had ever seen before, and he exerted himself to maintain the conversation. He was by no means a stupid young man himself, although badly educated; and he spoke English tolerably well, except that his Welsh accent was unmistakable.

"I think you are wrong in your view of civilization," he said; "men, as they become enlightened and cultivated, shake off the superstitions and evil habits which clung to them before. This is the process we call civilization—it is nothing more or less than the gradual development of the best and noblest instincts of man. According to your theory, you will be compelled to admit that the less civilized a man is, the better it will be for his fellow-men."

"I do not admit anything of the kind,"

he rejoined ; “ if we cannot change our evil natures, it is well to conceal and restrain them so far as possible. Thousands of people who care nothing for religion, and are not capable of responding to appeals to their moral feelings, are kept in the paths of ordinary rectitude by the fear of disgrace, and of lowering themselves in the eyes of their fellow-men. This invaluable feeling of self-respect is the only beneficial effect of the humanizing process you have described ; although I do not agree with you as to the development by it of any of the sterling good qualities of mankind. They are cultivated by other means.”

The conversation, which had been attentively listened to by Edward and Maria, but not by Mrs. Montessor, who could not understand one half of what was said, and was proportionately disposed to be sullen, was interrupted by the retirement of the ladies, leaving the three gentlemen to sit over the wine for a short time. Hitherto Frederick had not addressed Edward at all ;

but he now did so. He had noticed that the youth was ill at ease, and was treated in a cold, repellent manner by the hostess and her daughter, and Frederick was sorry for him. He also observed that he was drinking rather more wine than was likely to do him good.

“Do you not think you had better not take more wine?” he said, very kindly, as the youth stretched forth his hand to the decanter. The words were spoken so gently and pleasantly, that it was impossible to take offence, and Edward yielded with a good grace.

“I am afraid you are injuring yourself, my friend, by drinking too much,” said the clergyman, severely, for he was unable to convey a reproof gently; and the result was that Edward flushed with anger, and would have made a bitter reply had not Frederick interposed.

“Mr. Campbell meant no offence, I am sure,” he said, soothingly. “We are all fond of a good glass of wine sometimes, only we must not take it too frequently.”

“I do not often drink it, and it does not agree very well with me,” said the youth, addressing Frederick.

“Your sister must look sharply after you, I see,” laughed Frederick. “By the way, why is she not here to-night?”

“She caught a cold on the mountains last night, and not feeling very well, she did not like to run the risk of passing through the night air.”

Frederick’s heart beat a little faster when he heard of her illness, trifling though it might be. His interest in her was rapidly deepening and becoming stronger.

“Your sister is not in very good health, I believe,” said Mr. Campbell, again interposing. “She exerts herself more than she ought to do. She must take care of herself.”

“I feel that; and now I am going away, so that she will have no one to be at hand if anything should happen,” replied Edward. “She wishes me to go, however, and of course I cannot stay here always.”

“Where are you going?” asked Frederick.

“To Abernant,” he replied, naming a large town and fashionable watering-place on the northern border of the county; “I am to enter my uncle’s office. He is a lawyer, and as we are his nearest living relatives he has promised to help me.”

He was a good-meaning young man, but his indolent, aimless habits had led him into dissipation. He had never been accustomed to work; and Mr. Campbell feared that he would not readily settle down to the routine of legal life.

“I hope you will be very successful,” said Frederick, earnestly; “you have only to try hard in order to make your life a successful one. Suppose we seek the ladies?”

Mrs. Montessor was discussing church questions with her daughter, as they entered, and in fact Maria had been trying to explain to her mother what Frederick had been talking about at the dinner-table.

“I was just saying how beautiful it would be if all the different sects were united together, Mr. Danvers,” said Mrs. Montessor;

“for my own part I do not see much harm in Dissenters. There is a minister in Gly-narth named Darby, and he is a very good sort of a fellow, I believe. He is better educated too than they usually are, and I have often told him he would make a splendid curate.”

Mr. Campbell had heard something of the kind before, and it was very distasteful to him, for under no circumstances could a Unitarian minister be fit society for a clergyman.

“Anybody seems fit to be a curate in Wales,” said Frederick, sarcastically. “Do you ever ordain the parish clerk and sexton, I wonder? By lowering her standard, the Church is injuring her own prospects very materially. What do you say, Miss Montressor?”

“That the whole subject is a very stupid one,” replied the young lady, pettishly; “mamma may patronize this young man as much as she likes, but I do not see the necessity for boring us with him. I want

you to tell us some exciting story, Mr. Danvers, something that will send us to bed in a delightful fright ! ”

Everybody joined in pressing her request, and Frederick complied by telling them a thrilling story about a tiger-hunt in which he had once taken part. It was unanimously declared to be a charming adventure, and thus the evening passed pleasantly away.

Frederick thought, however, as he returned to the Lodge, that it would have been very much more pleasant if Annie Hughes had been one of the party, and bright through the deepening shadows arose before his mind's eye the memory of her sweet lovely face. Decidedly Frederick Danvers was in love !

CHAPTER III.

TOTTERING HOUSES.

MONTRESSOR HOUSE was a fair specimen of the average Welsh mansion. It was an ancient erection, originally built about the time of Henry VIII., and it had been so frequently renovated and added to, that it was difficult to say what style of architecture had been originally adopted; and as the subsequent additions had been made more with a view to utility than beauty, the whole effect, to an artistic eye, was by no means pleasing. It was in fact a large gloomy-looking rambling place, built around three sides of a square, whilst on the fourth lay the grounds.

The Montressors claimed to have come

into Wales at the time of its subjugation by the first Edward, and this particular estate had been in the family ever since. They were not much liked by the people, for they were a haughty stubborn race, mixing with no one except their aristocratic neighbours, if such there happened to be, or at furthest with a chosen few from the middle classes. The present lady of the manor was particularly obnoxious, because her own origin was well known, and yet her pride was more unyielding and arrogant than that of any of her predecessors. Unpleasant rumours had also been set afloat at various times, during her husband's lifetime, that her treatment of him was not of the gentlest kind, and some went so far as to lay the blame of his early death upon her shoulders. However that might be, her reputation was not an enviable one out of doors, and she was perfectly aware of it.

The day after the dinner-party the lady sat in her boudoir, awaiting the arrival of the post, which came in between one and

two o'clock in the afternoon, and the letters were delivered by an infirm old postmistress, who received the magnificent sum of three pounds annually from Government for her trouble. As she had no other means of support, it was a matter of surprise that she managed to exist at all, but it was evident from her appearance that she only contrived to keep body and soul together. She brought a number of letters to Montessor House that afternoon, and they were conveyed to Mrs. Montessor, who examined them all previous to distributing them to their respective owners. This done, she took up the three missives which were addressed to her.

One of these letters evidently contained news which was deeply interesting to the lady, for she sat for a long time deeply buried in thought; and, judging from the pleasant smile upon her face, her reflections were of an agreeable nature. The letter itself was in a female handwriting, and was strongly perfumed. It contained nearly

eight pages of closely-written matter, which the receiver perused carefully over and over again. At length she refolded the letter, and put it away in her desk; then she sent her maid to call Maria.

That young lady was in a discontented state of mind, for she had received no letters, and was vexed and annoyed in consequence. She guessed, however, that her mother had something of importance to tell her, and she therefore smoothed her ruffled feelings, and went to Mrs. Montessor's boudoir.

"Any news, mamma?" she asked, as she entered the room.

"Yes, I have news for you; but you may as well close that door, and sit down before I begin," replied her mother, "and as we may very likely have a long conversation, you had better tell the servants to say we are out if any one should call."

The bell was rung, and the necessary order given.

"What is it about, mamma?" asked Maria. when these little preliminaries were

over, for she was burning with curiosity to hear her mother's news.

“I wish to speak to you about Mr. Danvers,” replied Mrs. Montessor; “I have succeeded in discovering who and what he is, and I find him to be a young man of independent fortune, having an estate near Manchester. He has received a first-rate education, has mixed in the best English and Continental society, and although inclined to be a free-thinker, is a very earnest and clever man. All this a correspondent tells me by to-day's post.”

“How did you contrive to make inquiries?” asked her admiring daughter.

“It was not a difficult matter,” replied her mother; “one of his servants told our footman that his master had been residing near Manchester, and as I know a lady who is in that neighbourhood, I wrote to her about him. She does not know him personally, but says she has heard a great deal about him. I suppose you are able to guess why I took all this trouble?”

Maria had a shrewd notion, but she affected to be in perfect darkness upon the subject.

“He will make a very eligible husband,” said her mother; “that is why I instituted these inquiries. He is the very person to suit you, and if we succeed in snaring him, you will be a very lucky girl. You are getting rather old too, Maria, and it is quite time you were settled. You have been engaged already I don’t know how many times, and nothing ever came of any of your engagements. You are nearly twenty-four, and in a short time you will be out of the market, as these vulgar young men say, and I am becoming quite anxious about you.”

The gentle Maria had in fact been engaged several times, for her affections were of an easy accommodating nature, and could be transferred with the greatest facility from one object to another.

“Mr. Danvers is very gentlemanly,” she remarked mildly.

“Yes, and if he were not, he has a good

balance at his bankers, and that is all you want," replied her mother, roughly; "the only question is, can we secure him? You must flatter him, talk philosophy and sentiment to him, encourage him in his whims and fancies, if he has any; do anything, in short, to win his favour—his love if you can. I am extremely anxious about it, Maria, for, to tell you the plain downright truth, unless you marry well, we may end our days in the workhouse!"

"Mamma!" exclaimed the startled young lady, who began to fear that her mother was a little demented. Was not the Montessor estate theirs, to do what they pleased with?

"We may be penniless before long, girl," repeated her mother, emphatically, rising as she spoke, and throwing open the window. "Look at the landscape before you, how fair and beautiful it is, stretching away to the sea-shore. *Our* estate, you will say. It is nothing of the kind: not one inch of it is ours. We are spending money and enjoy-

ing rights which do not belong to us. Do you understand me, Maria? ”

“I certainly do not,” replied the young lady. “If it is not ours, whose is it? Father left it us in his will—nobody can dispute that.”

“True, but it was not your father’s to leave,” replied her mother; “he was as much a trespasser as we are. He succeeded his elder brother, as you are aware. This brother was married, but about two years before his death he ran away with a young woman from this neighbourhood—herself a married woman—and took his son, a lad of ten years of age, with him. Both of them disappeared completely, but in two years’ time we heard of the father’s death, but his son had been missed from his American home.”

“Who was the person that went with him? ” asked Maria, eagerly.

“Annie Hughes’s mother,” was the reply. “She was an unusually pretty woman, something of the same style as her daughter, and

the elopement caused great pain to the whole neighbourhood. Her name is not mentioned by anyone, and it is not known whether she be dead or alive."

"You have told me something of this story before," said Maria, impatiently, "it hardly bears re-telling. Why should you rake it up again?"

"Because this missing son *is alive*," replied her mother, "and he may appear at any time to claim the estate. Do you understand me now?"

Her pale cheeks, and lips which quivered with agitation, showed how fully she understood their position.

"Are you sure of this, mamma?" she exclaimed, eagerly. "If he be alive, why has he not returned sooner to claim his own?"

"I cannot explain it to you now," was the reply, "but it is nevertheless true. Edmund Montessor is alive, and will one day claim the estate—probably before long."

“What are we to do, then?” asked Maria, gloomily. Beggary and a descent from wealth and plenty to penury and want, are not agreeable subjects to ponder upon. No wonder that she was alarmed, for she clung to the luxuries and ease of their present life more tenaciously, if possible, than her mother.

“We must fight to the last, of course,” replied Mrs. Montessor, in a fierce, harsh voice, that made her daughter start. “I will not readily give up the wealth I struggled so hard for, but I fear it will be useless. He must succeed in the end, unless, indeed—” but she checked herself without giving utterance to her thought.

“Unless what, mamma?” asked Maria.

“Unless something unforeseen happens,” was the reply, although this was not what she had intended to say. *That* thought was too dreadful to be uttered; and for a moment or two, mother and daughter sat in silence, as if the same thing had occurred to both, but neither could utter it.

CHAPTER IV.

A SECRET VISIT.

“You can fully comprehend now my anxiety to see you comfortably settled,” pursued Mrs. Montessor at length ; “and I think it will be easy to secure this young man. We are the only aristocratic family in the place, and therefore the only people he can be intimate with. He is sure to fall in love with you—young men are so foolish and ready to fall in love with anybody, unless there is some counter-attraction, and in this case there is none. I believe that, if the handsomest young man in the world were shut up for a month in a cabbage-garden with the ugliest young woman, he would fall in love with her, and persuade himself

that she was a rare combination of beauty and wit, and that the cabbage-garden was a perfect Elysium ! ”

She spoke bitterly and scornfully, for in *her* heart the passion of love had never existed. *She* could not understand the deep, loving tenderness, the attachment of years that bound people together ; the feeling had never entered into her soul, although the words of love had often dwelt upon her lips. Her life had been a loveless one, but she did not miss a joy which she could never appreciate ; and her daughter was in a fair way to follow her example.

“ How must I set about it ? ” asked Maria, who rather doubted her own powers of fascination.

“ In any way you think proper,” was the reply. “ Ask him here as often as you like ; get him to take walks and rides with you ; find out his weak points, and act upon your knowledge—do everything, in fact, except actually propose to him—you cannot, of course, do that ! ”

“It is a great pity I cannot,” said Maria, sadly; “it would simplify matters very much, and he is too courteous and gentlemanly to refuse a lady! It would be the safest course, mamma.”

“My dear, you must not dream of such a thing,” cried Mrs. Montessor, who believed her daughter to be speaking seriously; “he would be shocked beyond measure. Men have such funny ideas about female modesty!”

“I will write to him, asking him to drop in this evening,” said Maria.

“Do so, for I am obliged to go out after dinner, which must be half an hour earlier to-day; and then you can have him all to yourself. Make a good use of your opportunity. Go now, I want to be alone.”

The note was duly despatched, and Mr. Danvers promised to look in during the evening. He was neither prepossessed nor prejudiced against the mother and daughter, although he thought the former to be a hard and rather vulgar woman; but then he

thought nearly all people of this class in the country are vulgar, and it was amusing enough to him; so, when Maria's note was brought to him, he determined upon accepting the invitation. He was rather dull, and it would be rude to refuse when they were evidently so well disposed towards him.

When he arrived at the house he found Maria alone, her mother having gone out, she said, to visit a poor sick woman on the hills. Frederick thought that she had selected a strange time of the day for her charitable excursion, but, of course, he made no remark.

Mrs. Montessor had been silent and gloomy during dinner, and she did not recur to the interesting subject which they had been discussing. When the ceremony was over, she retired to her own rooms and changed her dress, putting on a garment resembling those worn by the native women; and, in order to complete her disguise, she put on a large shawl, and one of those queer high-crowned hats worn by the humbler

classes. When her toilet was completed, she surveyed herself in the glass with evident satisfaction. "Nobody can possibly recognize me," she thought. "Mrs. Montessor would never attire herself thus; and now, I have only to escape the observation of the servants—my difficulties will be nearly over then."

This was a comparatively easy task, as there was a private staircase leading into a disused room, from whence a window opened upon the grounds, so that in a few minutes she stood beneath the shadow of the trees which surrounded the house. Every residence in Glynarth with any pretensions to respectability was thickly surrounded by trees; and when a new house was built, trees and shrubs were always plentifully planted, for the country was naturally very bare and destitute of vegetation, and the small clusters thus formed produced an agreeable variety in the landscape.

The moon on this particular night was peeping from behind a mass of heavy, black

clouds, and gave a faint silvery gleam to the sea. It was becoming dark at an earlier hour than usual, and the approaching night seemed fraught with storms and rain. On the hills a deep gloom had settled, and the night wind moaned and murmured plaintively through the boughs of the trees. Mrs. Montessor shuddered slightly, and for a moment seemed inclined to return to the warm and comfortable apartment which she had just left. The errand that she was bent upon, however, was not one that could be put off or delayed, and, therefore, she set out on her journey.

There were but few travellers on the roads. There were but few at all times, fewer still on so cheerless a night, and she therefore ran no risk of detection. The passers-by accosted her with the usual greeting of "Nos dawch;" but as she could speak their language fluently when she chose to do so, she was able to reply to them, and thus avoid suspicion. As she left the village behind, however, and reached the

hilly district in which Frederick Danvers had found himself, the way became quite deserted, and, as the moon was now quite obscured, it was perfectly dark.

She went on without the slightest fear, for she knew well enough that there was no one to harm or molest her. Only her own dark thoughts, darker even than the black canopy of heaven above her, made her start sometimes when any slight sound struck upon her ear. Outwardly, all was still; inwardly, her breast was filled with guilty schemes and fears. Hitherto her route had been along the high road, but when she reached the turning into the lane which led to the old woman's door, she passed quickly into it, and found herself in a short time before the hut.

She knocked gently, and the old crone opened immediately and invited her to enter. The lady obeyed the request, and closed the door carefully behind her. The interior of the hut was illumined only by the dull glow of the peat-fire, for the candle was

not lighted, although it had been placed on the table. The old woman asked her visitor to be seated, proffering at the same time the three-legged stool, but she refused.

“I do not intend to remain long, Sian,” she said, for this was the name by which the old woman was known; “you know what my business is, and I came to ask whether you are prepared to come to terms with me?”

She spoke in Welsh, for the old woman could not maintain a conversation in English.

“I know what you are seeking,” she replied, “and it is no use for you to come here. It is perfectly useless, I assure you.”

“You have not yet heard what I have to say, Sian,” said Mrs. Montessor. “I want these papers, which can be of no possible use to you; which, indeed, you cannot understand, but which might be of service to me. Why should you wish to keep them in your possession?”

“Because I suspect you would make an improper use of them, my lady,” said the

old woman ; “ I cannot trust you, for all your fine talk. What do you want them for ? ”

“ Merely because I believe they have some reference to our family ; and of course everything which belongs to the family is interesting to me,” was the plausible reply ; “ you, on the other hand, can never turn them to any good account. Restore them therefore to their proper owners. We have, in fact, a right to demand them ; but I do not wish to urge that. Give them up quietly, and you shall have five pounds to buy blankets for the winter.”

The old woman’s eyes glittered greedily as she mentioned the bribe. Gold was a scarce commodity in those districts, and she had never even seen so large a sum as five pounds at once. Her cupidity, however, did not overpower her cunning. If these papers were worth five pounds, they might be worth a great deal more.

“ Ni ddelir hēn adar a mǎn ūs,”* she

* “ Old birds are not caught with chaff,” a common saying in Wales.

muttered; "you would not take all this trouble, my lady, if it were a matter of mere curiosity."

"What other motive can I have, old woman?" cried Mrs. Montessor, haughtily. "You are forgetting yourself strangely."

"People do not come here late at night, if their errand is as honest as you say," replied Sian, with a cunning grin. "Why not drive here in your carriage in the light of day, if you are not afraid that people will see you?"

This was a question that Mrs. Montessor could not well answer, for she perceived that the old crone was shrewd enough to see through her shallow attempt to deceive her.

"I should be very sorry were it known that I had anything to do with you," she said, with a haughty toss of her head; "I am equally sorry that I came here at all."

"Then you can go back, my lady, as easily as you came," replied Sian, coldly; "I never deal with people who are ashamed of me in any way."

Mrs. Montessor perceived that she was not likely to gain her object by pursuing her present policy, and she therefore attempted to pacify the old woman.

“It is no use quarrelling with me, Sian,” she said, mildly; “I have been kind to you before, and I will be again. I have set my heart upon having these papers, and I am sure you will not refuse to oblige me.”

“If it were only an ordinary thing, I would oblige you directly, my lady,” replied the old woman, resolutely; “but I am afraid I should be acting wrongly if I were to give them up; and I have too many sins to answer for already, without adding any more to the number. If I were only sure you meant no harm, I would give them up directly; but I do not understand the business, and I will not give them up until I do.”

“Why will you not believe me, Sian?” asked the lady, persuasively. “You know I have never wronged or injured you in any way, and I would not do so for the world.

I am quite certain these are family papers, therefore they belong to me as the head of the family. If a ten-pound note will——”

This was an unfortunate suggestion, for it confirmed the old woman’s former suspicion, which had been almost lulled by the lady’s plausible statement.

“The gold has not been coined that will buy them, my lady,” she said, firmly, but respectfully, for Mrs. Montessor was an important personage in the eyes of the people: “they were intrusted to me by your late brother-in-law; and until he sends to me to give them up, I will keep them. That is my answer.”

“Then hear mine!” cried the lady, drawing her shawl closer around her; “unless you leave this place before this day fortnight, I will have it pulled down about your ears. Your insolence shall not pass unpunished. I will not allow impudent vagrants to remain upon my estate.”

And with these words upon her lips, she swept out of the hut, and could almost

imagine that she heard the words, "my estate," repeated scornfully by the old woman. If she had been asked what these papers were which she was so anxious to obtain, she would have been at a loss to know what to reply. She knew only, or rather she believed, that they were of immense importance in the coming contest, and she had utterly failed to obtain them! She had been foiled by a miserable old woman, the veriest dust of the earth, and lowest of the low! She gnashed her teeth in rage as she thought of her futile errand, and paused upon the top of the hill to shake her fist in impotent anger at the hut she had just left. But suddenly her passion seemed to pass away, for strange sounds issued from the old woman's abode. The light from fire and candle was now distinctly visible, and on the night breeze came wafted the strains of weird, solemn music, almost unearthly in its quaint beauty. Stronger and higher came the flood of melody, and the heart of the solitary listener upon the deserted hill

beat faster as the dirge-like harmony fell upon her ears. Anon it burst forth into wild triumphant tones, and then died away in plaintive wailings, that almost resembled an outburst of human woe, and nothing more was heard except the mournful murmur of the wind; but as she sped homewards, spirit-voices, echoes of that wild music she had just heard, seemed to ring in her ears the knell of her ambitious schemes and designs.

CHAPTER V.

DAWNING LOVE.

TIME hung heavily sometimes on Frederick Danvers' hands. It was difficult to be always admiring the scenery, and always taking long walks. He was not a strong man either, and was therefore not much given to physical exertion. Quieter pleasures suited him better, although they were not easily to be found at Glynarth. Mrs. Montessor was right when she said that idle young men fall easily in love; but she forgot that Maria was not the only pretty girl in the neighbourhood. Life in the interior of a land which was an unknown one to him, was so dull after its first novelty and charm had faded away, that he was

delighted to find this new excitement, and this hitherto untasted joy—that of falling in love.

His evening with Maria Montessor was an excessively dull one. She bored him with an endless stream of very small talk, flattered him openly and grossly, and had disgusted him by her attempts to discuss subjects about which she knew absolutely nothing. So upon the next afternoon, he determined upon going down the valley to visit Annie Hughes, feeling sure that he would find something more refreshing in her society.

He started soon after luncheon, and strolled leisurely along, admiring the gleam of light which shone upon the placid waters, the rich verdure and wild blossoms which covered the hill-sides; and stopping occasionally to examine some curious flower or plant that might attract his attention. He was purposely prolonging his walk, not because he took much interest in these things, but because he was rather doubtful

as to whether he had any right to call upon Annie at all. She might not wish to cultivate his acquaintance, although this was hardly probable, judging from their first conversation; but at any rate she might be displeased at being visited in her own house by a friend of so recent a date.

“I don’t think I ought to go,” he thought, half aloud, as was his wont when musing. “I only met her for the first time three days ago, and perhaps she won’t like it. If I go back, though, I shall be miserable all day long, and I should very much like to see her again. What a sweet smile she has! and such a pleasant face! I declare I’ll go. I may as well risk it.”

A quiet, grave smile rested upon his countenance as he caught himself musing thus. He had often thought it strange that he should have escaped the influence of the fascinations of so many sirens in the gay world, to be caught at last by this simple country girl!

He reached the gate and passed in. No

signs of life could be seen about the house, and he began to think that he had come, after all, upon a bootless errand, and that Annie was out. He determined to ascertain, however, whether this were the case or not; and accordingly he pushed open the gate which divided the farmyard from a small flower-garden in front of the house, and then he rapped at the door. Bells and knockers were unknown luxuries there, and he had to use his knuckles. There was the same stillness as before; but he repeated the summons, and then a footfall could be heard within the house. A minute or two however elapsed before the door was opened; and then Annie appeared, looking rather flurried and confused, as if she had been endeavouring to make herself presentable at a moment's notice. She was also rather surprised to find that he had condescended to call upon her, but she was none the less pleased to see him.

“I presume you did not expect me to invade your territories,” he said, with a

pleasant smile, as she opened the door; “you are so romantically situated, however, that it was impossible not to explore so charming a retreat.”

“It is a surprise, certainly; but I am very glad to see you here,” she answered, simply.

He was shown into the sitting-room of the little family, a low, heavy apartment, in which Frederick was in continual danger of running his head against the ceiling; but it was a very comfortable, cosy room. An antiquated sideboard stood against one wall, upon which was a motley array of glass, old china, and family relics. The fireplace was not a wide, spacious one, like most farm-houses possessed, but a small modern grate, with a still smaller amount of fire in it. A few chairs, a table with folding leaves, some faded pictures, and a small side-table—upon which was the family Bible, containing the archives of the race for many generations—completed the furniture of the room,—with one exception, and that was a notable one:

there was a small harmonium, an instrument which had then been but recently invented, and was almost unknown except in the towns. Frederick was surprised to find one in so remote a spot, and he expressed his astonishment.

“I happened to hear of them,” Annie explained; “and I thought one would be useful in our little church, so I bought one.”

“Can you play?” he asked, wondering to find musical cultivation in so unlikely a locality.

“A little,” she replied, with a laugh; “I am only just beginning, but fortunately there is no one who understands music in the congregation, so that when I make awful discords they think it is all right.”

Frederick laughed too; and while she was talking she had taken up a slip of embroidery work, and had drawn her chair near to the window, whilst he sat opposite to her, in an easy-chair, smoking a fragrant cigar. As she spoke, her face was lighted up with so radiant a smile that she appeared positively

beautiful,—at least Frederick thought so, as he watched her from the cloud of smoke in which he was enveloped. His eyes wandered from her face to her dress. If she had had an hour to prepare for his visit, she could have selected no attire which suited her better than the one she wore. She had on a plain black dress, and a little shawl over her shoulders; in her soft, luxuriant hair was a bow of blue ribbon, that blended admirably with the rich brown hue of her sunny tresses. As he sat in silence, watching her, an involuntary smile would flit occasionally across her countenance, as if very pleasant thoughts were passing through her mind.

“What are you thinking of, that you smile so often, Miss Hughes?” he asked, after watching her a little while.

“I am only smiling at my own foolish thoughts,” she answered, looking up from her work; “it is a habit I have, even when my thoughts are not of a very pleasant nature.”

“It would be well if we could all form a

habit like it," he said ; " for my own part, I am but seldom inclined to smile when I commune with myself."

" That is owing, no doubt, to the fact that you take a gloomy view of things ; and magnify every little trouble, instead of regarding it as an inevitable event, of which we must meet a certain number in life," she observed, gently ; " I daresay you think my life is a very pleasant one ? "

She was inclined to moralize, he thought ; but she did it very pleasantly.

" I am sure it must be a pleasant one. What can you possibly have to trouble you ? "

" A great deal that you would never think of," she answered, with a tinge of sadness in her tone ; " just now, I am very anxious about my brother."

" He is going away, I believe," said Frederick ; " but why are you anxious about him ? "

" He has been so strange lately," she said. " Ever since it was determined that

he should go to Abernant he has been restless and unhappy. I do not think he likes the idea of going at all; but, of course, he must do something. I have impressed that upon him, but still he is not reconciled."

"He will soon settle down to work when he has been fairly started in his new career," replied Frederick, soothingly. "You must not be surprised if a youth who has never been from home shrinks a little when he is first called upon to do so."

"It may be so," she said, doubtfully; "but I am very much afraid that when he has commenced business, he will take a dislike to it, form bad acquaintances, and be led astray, he is such a strange, wayward boy. I wish I could be always with him."

"That is quite impossible, Miss Hughes. Your brother must learn, like everybody else, to make his own way in the world; and I have no doubt he will try to do so, if only for your sake. It does not fall to every one's lot to have such a sister."

She blushed slightly, and bent lower over

her work as he spoke. She was not accustomed to hear nor to receive idle compliments, and she had no reason to think he was trifling—neither was he. He could use the language of flattery as well as most young men; but, in the presence of this girl, his every word was full of earnestness.

“He has no one to help or advise him but me,” she went on, sadly; “and he is not very willing to listen to my advice. I am only a girl, he says, and cannot know the world, about which he is very ignorant himself, if he would only believe it. My power over him is indeed much less than you imagine.”

“I believe I have as much, if not more real power and influence than any one at Glynarth,” he said, seriously; “and if you will let me take your brother in hand—if you will share your burden with me—I should be very glad and happy, more so than you would deem possible. I am older than he is, my social position perhaps is a little higher, my experience of the world

much greater, and I am sure I should succeed in gaining his confidence. Shall I try? ”

“If you please,” she said, looking up into his face; and his heart yearned towards her as he saw her beautiful eyes filled with tears. “I should be so glad to have a friend who could control him in any way. Besides, it is always good to have a friend we can fully trust.”

She was too ignorant of the world's ways to know that polite society would have been shocked by such an admission after so brief an acquaintance. She was a child in the confiding simplicity and artlessness of her nature.

The subject of their conversation came in soon afterwards, and Frederick was asked to stay to tea. He had not yet dined, but he did not say so, and he gladly accepted the invitation. Annie began immediately to make her preparations, and Edward sat rather sullenly near the fire.

“When are you going to Abernant? ”

asked Frederick, feeling it necessary to commence the task he had taken upon himself.

“In two or three days,” was the laconic reply.

Edward was rather afraid of this gentleman after the party at Montessor House, and he regarded him with that respect which an accomplished man of the world always commands from a raw youth who has never left the domestic circle. It would not therefore be a very difficult task to produce a favourable impression upon him.

The tea was a snug and cosy affair. Annie, as a matter of course, presided at the urn, and Frederick made himself useful by cutting the bread and butter, a task which, he declared, his bachelor experience eminently qualified him to perform. Some apple jam of Annie’s own manufacture was produced, and declared to be excellent, and, altogether, the meal was a very successful one. When it was over, Edward took his hat to go out, but Frederick observed, as he was about to leave the room,—

“I hope you will walk up to the Lodge with me, as your stay here is to end so soon. I have some curious things which I would like to show you, and should be glad of your company.”

“Nothing could give me greater pleasure, sir,” replied Edward, making an attempt to be polite.

“I shall not start for another hour, I think,” continued Frederick; “until then you may leave me to amuse your sister. I see you are anxious to be off.”

He was already assuming a slight degree of authority over him, and he intended taking him up to his house in order to deepen the impression already made upon him.

“I believe I shall succeed in influencing him to some extent,” remarked Frederick as the door closed behind the youth. “Between us we ought to do him some good.”

He was thankful that a bond of any kind existed between them, and he felt that this union with her in the effort to keep her brother

from evil was one well calculated to ripen into a warmer feeling eventually than mere friendship. How far he was prepared to go in this direction was a question which he had not yet asked himself—he was conscious only that this girl strongly fascinated him, and he was not disposed to break the spell,—not just yet at all events.

The hour slipped away, and another in its wake, but Edward did not make his appearance. His sister, however, was not alarmed about him, for he was frequently absent for hours beyond the time fixed for his return. Neither she nor her companion found the time hanging heavily upon their hands, for they were engaged in animated conversation about every conceivable subject of local interest. He inquired about the Mr. Darby who had been mentioned by Mrs. Montessor, and thought that he detected a faint blush upon Annie's cheek when he mentioned his name.

“Mr. Darby was a young Unitarian minister,” she said, “and presided over a

small congregation, mostly composed of English residents, at a place some two miles distant."

She was not disposed, however, to be very communicative about him, and Frederick did not press the subject. He was, in fact, perfectly indifferent as to who or what Mr. Darby might be, for he could have no possible connection with him, he thought. He did not dream how deeply this gentleman's movements would interest him in a short time!

The twilight came, and Frederick felt that he ought to return home.

"Do not send me away without some music, Miss Hughes," he said, glancing at the harmonium; "I should be so pleased to hear you play."

She took her seat before the instrument, and began to play a Welsh hymn tune, a plaintive minor melody, deeply touching in its moaning melancholy cadence, which aroused strange echoes deep in her listener's breast. The waning twilight clung around

her like a veil, and her fair head bent low over the keys as she called forth those strains of melancholy harmony, but neither of them spoke a word. Their hearts were too full for words—full of the first rush of delicious joy, mingled with doubt and fear, which new-born love creates; she rejoiced to find a friend so brave and earnest; he, on his part, felt his whole soul yearning towards this fatherless, motherless, sisterless girl, who had placed her simple trust so readily in him.

The music ceased, but she did not raise her head, and he went to her in sudden alarm. She was weeping softly, and Frederick Danvers could not resist the impulse which bade him take the girlish form to his bosom, and whisper the one simple word so full of meaning—

“Annie!”

She was still weeping, but her head was resting now upon his breast.

“I was thinking of my father, and of my poor, unhappy mother.”

He knew the story—the sad, sorrowful story—and from the depths of his soul he pitied her.

“Think of something brighter, my darling,” he said, tenderly; “think of the peaceful home I will prepare for you; the long years of happiness we shall have together, and do not weep.”

How he soothed and comforted her it matters not—she smiled upon him at last, and dashed away her tears. Then he took up his hat to go, for he feared that his long stay would be commented upon; and as yet he did not wish her to be annoyed by vulgar gossip and banter. She came to the gate to bid him good-night, and with a parting pressure of the hand, he went away without having seen her brother again. That night, in the early night, was a memorable one for him. His heart was full of quiet happiness, which tinged the world and everything it contained with beauty in his eyes. The old listlessness which had led him to wander from country to country, and from town to

town, in quest of that contentment which seemed to be ever slipping from his eager grasp, was completely gone ; and he walked homewards with a lighter heart and with springing step, full of the new-born consciousness that at last he had some one to love and to live for. He had waited long for happiness like this, and had passed through years of trial and anxiety.

He had not always been a rich man, for his uncle held the estate until a few years before this time.

During Frederick's youth the lesson had always been impressed upon him that he must earn his own living, and he had paid good heed to it. Throughout the years of his youth he had struggled as but few struggle, without any assistance from his family, and in the hive of human workers in the great city where that period of his life was spent, none laboured harder than he. In those days and nights of weary hoping and striving, when every nerve had to be strained, in order that he might keep his

place in the battle, he was happier than when the estate came to his possession, and he had nothing to do but to watch others fighting, and almost to envy them the knocks and buffets they received. He went to a Scottish university, because he found idleness intolerable; and he had wandered about since then a young, but still a weary, aimless man. Love's bright dream had changed all this now; and the darkness which sat upon the hills was not so great, but that through the gloom his mind pictured a long future of peace and joy. Was it only a picture, or are Love's roseate dreams ever realized in this hard, practical world of ours?

CHAPTER VI.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

ON the following day Frederick sent a note down to the Glyn, as Annie Hughes's residence was commonly called, asking her brother to come up to the Lodge, and Edward complied at once with the request. Frederick showed him his library, his curiosities collected from many countries, and all his treasures, and then invited him to stay to luncheon.

Edward was in a thorough good humour after all these attentions, and when Frederick began to speak to him seriously and earnestly about his approaching departure, the new duties he was about to undertake, and the new responsibilities that would be

imposed upon him, he listened respectfully enough, and promised to do his best to succeed in his new calling.

“If you are in any trouble or difficulty, send to me,” said Frederick, kindly. “I will do my best for you, and you may, perhaps, find it easier to trust me than other people in the neighbourhood.”

Edward thought it certainly would be easier, and he promised to do as he was desired. He was leaving early the next morning, and would not therefore be able to see Mr. Danvers again, so that gentleman took his hat, and offered to accompany him to the Glyn. It was in reality a pretext to see Annie, but Edward was not aware of that. Falling in love, and with his sister, was about the last action he would attribute to Mr. Danvers, and he thought that his evident interest in him was nothing more than a passing fancy. On the way Edward suddenly exclaimed: “Mr. Darby is coming; I daresay he has been at our place.”

The gentleman whom Frederick saw

advancing to meet them was about twenty-eight years old, of average height, with light hair and whiskers elaborately curled and perfumed. He was dressed in a suit of clerical black, and wore the ordinary white necktie, and in one hand he had a bamboo cane with a golden handle. He was a clerical fop, in fact; and in addition to his little foibles in matters of dress, he was under the impression that he was a profoundly learned and clever man, and although in this respect he did not differ from many who believed themselves to be misunderstood and unappreciated men, he thought that every one with whom he came into contact acknowledged his immense mental superiority. For the purpose of impressing this more strongly upon their minds, he appeared to be always deeply absorbed in thought, and was generally full of some subject which nobody else took the trouble to think about. The subjects he chose to descant upon were never very abstruse, but his friends did not notice that, and even if they had, Mr. Darby

would have told them that the greatest philosopher was he who directed his attention to the smallest things.

Frederick had heard all this, and looked curiously at the approaching figure.

“Does he often go down to your house?” he asked, wondering whether he was in hopes of converting Annie to his views.

“Too frequently to please my sister,” answered Edward; “I fancy he is in love with her, and she can’t bear the fellow. Besides, she abhors Unitarianism, and has told him so over and over again; but he is much too clever to understand common sense hints.”

A fellow like this in love with Annie! The thought was simply absurd in Frederick’s opinion; for although he was by no means a conceited man, he saw the great social and mental difference between them. Rivalry and jealousy were therefore quite out of the question, and the next feeling which arose in his breast was one akin to anger, that this man had presumed to worship at

the same shrine as he! It did not strike him that Annie's position was but little superior to Mr. Darby's, and that to many, a minister or curate, however poor and brainless he might be, was nevertheless considered in Wales to be the height of a girl's ambition. He felt only that she whom he loved was by the mere fact of that love completely removed from the sphere she had before occupied. Undoubtedly Frederick Danvers was a proud man.

As these thoughts were resolving themselves into shape in his mind, Mr. Darby was coming to meet them with downcast eyes and meditative countenance.

"He is preparing a speech," laughed Edward; "he is sure to bring something queer out. He always begins to talk about some new theory or discovery whenever I meet him, and I see he is getting something of the kind ready now."

Mr. Darby had noticed the strange gentleman, and guessed who he was. This first opportunity of making an impression on

him was not to be lost, and he accordingly came towards them with the slow lingering gait and absent expression of countenance which he deemed necessary to support his reputation as a philosopher, and when near enough to Edward he accosted him gravely.

“It is a singular fact, my young friend,” he said, “that every fourth woman one meets is unmarried according to the last census. This is an alarming state of things, which every true philanthropist ought to endeavour to remedy. Now this remedy is, I think, an obvious one, if we consider the question by the aid of the ordinary laws of supply and demand.”

“Are *you* going to be married, Mr. Darby?” asked Edward, maliciously. “Unless you are, it is no use preaching to us. Give us a good example. But I ought to introduce this gentleman to you. Mr. Danvers, Mr. Darby.”

“I am happy to see you, sir,” said the philosopher, gravely, addressing Mr. Danvers. “I was, however, discussing this

question merely in the abstract. Supply and demand are the great laws and principles which regulate the marriage question as well as every other. Now it appears to me that the demand is decreasing, because the article supplied is not adapted to the requirements of the consumer—I mean of those who require it, or, in non-technical language, which we must sometimes have recourse to in treating popular questions, the women who are willing to be married are not proper persons to discharge satisfactorily the duties and obligations of married life.”

“What remedy would you propose then?” asked Frederick, who was highly amused by this display.

“I would remove the objections which are now urged with much effect by making the young women suited to their wants—that is to say, in order to express myself more clearly, I would have a law passed prohibiting marriage except with women who could prove themselves to be qualified for domestic life. That qualification would, of course,

differ in the various grades of society, but in every station of life I would compel them to undergo an examination in domestic economy and general household management. These examinations could be conducted by properly qualified matrons of long experience, who would award certificates of competency to all who passed, and the successful candidates only would be eligible for marriage."

"Then the first question a gentleman would ask his lady-love would be not, 'Do you love me?' but 'Have you a certificate?'" remarked Frederick, gravely.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Darby; "and unless she had one, he would have to pay his addresses elsewhere. As a matter of probability, however, it is extremely likely that when this examination would be first instituted thousands of young women would present themselves, and in a few years those not holding certificates would be the exception rather than the rule."

"Your scheme is an excellent one," remarked Frederick, preparing to move on.

“I hope you will ventilate it as much as possible; and, of course, as you are so deeply convinced of the evils of the present system, you will not marry until this examination has been set on foot, and you find a lady who has passed in honours. Your idea is a very good one; consecrate your life and talents to carry into effect so beneficent a scheme of reform,” and they shook hands and went on, leaving the philosopher rather taken aback at this practical application of his views.

“Is he at all clever?” asked Frederick, when they had gone a little way; “and does he always talk in this peculiar manner?”

“Yes, he is always the same,” answered Edward; “the only difference is that he continually changes his subject. Next time you meet him he will have something else in the wind.”

They were at the gate leading into the yard, and Frederick hesitated whether he would accept Edward’s invitation to go in.

Brother and sister might have many things to say to one another before parting for a long period, and he would have plenty of opportunities for seeing her after Edward was gone. He explained his reason for not coming in, and then prepared to turn back.

“I have one word of warning again to give you,” he said, “and that is, avoid drink. I do not suppose you will find it difficult to do so if you try, and I fear it is your chief temptation. For your dead father’s sake, for your sister’s sake, and, if my friendship is worth anything, for my sake, make every effort to be a credit and an honour to yourself and to all your friends. Promise that you will do so.”

He laid his hand as he spoke upon the young man’s shoulder, and looked into his face with his own clear, honest eyes. Edward could not resist such an appeal, and he gave the required pledge. He fully intended at the time to keep his promise, and it would have been well for him and for all belonging to him if he had done so. He

was fated, however, to remember his friend's advice a short time afterwards, and to curse his own folly that he had not followed it. At this moment, however, he was so full of the excitement of leaving home, so glad to be free from the fetters and restraints of his home life, and so confident that he should do well, that warnings and advice were thrown away upon him. Frederick feared, judging from the light, heedless way in which he made the promise, that it would not be observed, and he saw that it was useless at that moment to endeavour to make any impression upon him.

“Send me your address,” he said, as they parted. “I will write to you, and if you should want money or advice on any subject, let me know. I shall be very glad to be of service to you.”

Edward promised to do so, and then Frederick returned to Glynarth Lodge. He was sorely troubled respecting the youth. He had heard some unpleasant rumours about him that day, and he noticed with

pain that the person who told him of his former misconduct seemed to think that Edward's dissipated habits were well known to everybody, and took it for granted that Frederick had heard of them before.

“It is a great pity,” he mused, as he returned home, “a very great pity, for he is a good-meaning lad, only a little headstrong and wild. I can quite believe that he is addicted to drink—that was quite evident the other evening. I am afraid his departure will bring trouble upon his sister.”

Edward left very early next morning, and about eleven Frederick called at the house. Annie was very much depressed and low-spirited, and although her lover did all in his power to cheer her, he was not altogether successful.

“A shadow of coming evil seems to rest upon me,” she said. “I am sorry now that I let Edward go. It would have been better to make him a ploughboy here than to expose him to the temptations he will meet in Abernant.”

“You are really distressing yourself needlessly, my darling,” he said, drawing her to him, and caressing her tenderly. “The town where he has gone to is not such a large place, and thousands of young men go every year from home, and do well. Why should not he? If he is a little wayward and headstrong, he will remember his sister, and do his duty for her sake.”

She shook her head sadly, for her influence had failed to preserve him from temptation even in the country where she was present. Was it likely to be more effectual in a town and in her absence?

“Let us talk about something more cheerful than these gloomy forebodings,” he said, lightly; “I am going to Montessor House this evening, and I mean to tell them of our engagement.”

“Oh, no! please don’t. You really must not,” she cried, earnestly.

“Why not, dearest?” he asked, tenderly. “You surely are not ashamed of me?”

“No, no; you must not dream of such a

thing," she exclaimed, pleadingly. "I am the proudest, happiest girl in the world, enriched by your love; but you must not tell them just yet. We have only known each other for a few days;" and a deep blush overspread her face as she remembered how sudden their attachment had been. "And you must let a month or two elapse before you make it public."

"You little goose!" he said, laughingly; "do you think that love springs up and grows only with time, like potatoes or cabbages—that it must be watered by a certain number of tea-drinkings, and manured by a long course of love-making before the eyes of the world? That is not my creed. I loved you at the moment when I first met you in the mountain hut, and I shall always do so."

"But love is strengthened and purified by time, is it not?" she asked, taking up her embroidery.

"Most decidedly; but people have an idea that an engagement formed between

two persons who have not known each other very long is improper and ought to be discouraged, and yet most of these people have a dim idea lurking in their minds that somewhere in the world there is a partner fixed for everybody—that, in fact, marriages are made in heaven. I have been astonished to find this idea seriously advocated in all classes of society. If people are predestined for one another, we will hope that we are, and the sooner we fulfil our destiny the better, of course.”

She laughed and shook her head, still insisting on withholding the announcement for the present.

“Wait a couple of months, Mr. Danvers,” she said, for she had not yet dared to call him by his Christian name; “it will soon go by, and no one will feel surprised then.”

“Two months!” he exclaimed. “Why, I shall be thinking of ordering my wedding suit then. Say a month, and I will agree.”

“No, it must be two months,” she repeated, emphatically.

“Make a compromise then, and say six weeks,” he suggested, with a smile.”

“Not a day less than two months,” she said, very decidedly. “You ought to be very thankful that I am letting you off so easily and that I did not fix a year as your probation.”

There was another tender caress and some more soft speeches, and Frederick found that the time sped rapidly away. It was three o'clock before he rose to go, having forgotten all about luncheon.

“I must go to Montessor House this evening,” he said, searching around the room for his hat; “it is not a place I care to go to, but it must be done. We must submit to the iron yoke society imposes upon us. When may I come again?”

“Whenever you please,” she replied, with a half shy, half glad look into his face; “you are always welcome.”

Mrs. Montessor and her daughter had a long conference that afternoon in the same boudoir where their former conversation had

taken place. She had received some unpleasant communications that day, and her very plain features were absolutely hideous, distorted as they were with ungovernable rage.

She was walking up and down the room with long swift strides like a caged lioness when Maria entered.

“What is the matter, mamma?” asked that young lady as she came in.

“The matter, indeed!” cried her mother, turning upon her; “only this, that Edmund Montessor is on his way to England; that the papers which establish his claims to this estate can be easily obtained by him; and that *I* have failed to obtain them. Is not that enough, girl, for one day?”

Maria made no answer. Her heart sank within her as she heard of this pressing and imminent danger, in which she had not before really believed, hoping that it was in a great measure the creation of her mother’s imagination; but now this hope was gone, for the property was actually

slipping away from them. Maria partook more of her father's easy, indolent disposition than of her mother's high spirit, and she was not a councillor to be trusted in upon an emergency like the present. She could only sit in helpless agitation and alarm, wringing her hands and giving way to her distress. The sight inflamed her mother's wrath tenfold.

"Weak, miserable fool!" she cried; "you look as if a ghost had appeared to you. Would you give up such an estate as ours without even a struggle to retain it? You are quite worthless in a case like this, when I am so much in need of help. I can place no reliance upon you. I told you to captivate Mr. Danvers, but you have done nothing in that direction. He is as much out of your reach as on the first day he came."

"Further, mamma," said her daughter, despairingly, "he is in love with another."

"In love with another!" exclaimed her mother, with renewed anger and alarm.

“Some English or foreign lady, I suppose?”

“No, mamma, the young lady is Annie Hughes.”

If a cannon ball had whistled through the apartment, or a bottle of Greek fire been deposited at her feet, she would not have been more astounded. Surprise and astonishment made her speechless, and when she began to recover her breath, she could only gasp out a few words at intervals.

“The hussy!—the impudent jade!—what monstrous conduct!”

Gradually, however, the paroxysm passed away, and she began immediately to take a more hopeful view of things.

“How do you know this, Maria? Are you quite sure of it?”

The young lady had heard from her maid that Mr. Danvers had become very intimate with brother and sister, and that he was often at the Glyn—oftener than at Montessor House. Accordingly she drew her own inferences, which were in reality correct,

although her mother refused to look at the matter in that light.

“He is only amusing himself,” she said, confidently. “He is too much a man of the world to be trapped by a mere country girl; but she is none the less to be blamed. We must put an end to her scheme, and I will tell you how we can do it. I know a person at Abernant who is deeply in my debt. He shall seek young Hughes, lead him into mischief, get him disgraced, and then we shall see whether this fine gentleman will marry the sister of a disgraced man—we shall see.”

Her voice was truly diabolical in its passion and evil hatred.

“That is your affectionate cousin’s portrait,” she said, savagely, producing a photograph taken upon glass in the old style—“the fellow who is coming to wrest the estate from us, and make us beggars—if he can. But he has not done it yet. I will burn this wretched old hag’s house over her head, even if she is roasted alive in it, rather than let him triumph over me!”

She had discovered then the nature of the papers in the old woman's possession.

"How did she obtain these papers?" asked Maria, abruptly.

"By the aid of her patron the devil, for aught I know," was the fierce reply; "she has them—that is enough for me, but she will not have them a week hence. Come what may, I am determined never to give up this place; and if Sian is obstinate, she shall feel my grip."

The words were so cruelly uttered, that the girl could not help shuddering.

"It sickens you, does it?" cried her mother, scornfully. "It is well for you that I am made of sterner stuff than you are, or else we should be beggared outcasts in a short time. There! leave me now. I must think! I must think!"

And with her hand pressed upon her burning brow, she remained in deep meditation for some hours, trying to devise a way of escape from her gathering difficulties, but she saw none. It was very dark,

and not a glimmer of light fell upon her path. She knew only that to retain the estate she would have to plunge deeply into crime ; but in her present state of mind there was no abyss of infamy into which she would not plunge to save her position. A truly desperate woman she was, for she had arrived at such a pitch that she would stop at nothing, hesitate at nothing, to preserve her beloved place as the Lady of Montessor House.

CHAPTER VII.

MARIA LAYS HER PLANS.

MRS. MONTRESSOR and her daughter were in the drawing-room that evening, endeavouring to appear cheerful and unconcerned, when Mr. Danvers was announced ; and immediately, as if by a magician's wand, their faces were wreathed with smiles, and he was received in the most cordial manner possible.

“I really feared that we were never to see you again, Mr. Danvers,” said the lady, making an effort to be gay. “Your visits, like those of angels, are few and far between.”

“You are too hard upon me,” he said, rather stiffly, for he saw no reason why he

should go there too frequently. "I called a few days ago when you were out, but Miss Montessor did me the honour to receive me."

"And she told me afterwards how greatly she enjoyed your visit," remarked the mother, whilst Maria cast her eyes downwards in sweet confusion and blushed. "I am afraid you are going to abandon society and become a recluse. Glynarth was famous for its monastery and monks in the olden times."

"Nothing could be farther from my mind," he replied; "but the fact is, I have been disappointed in Wales—in this part of Wales at least. There is nothing to look at but flat clayey fields and bleak-looking mountains, and I can't go into raptures over them."

"That is because you shut yourself up, and never try to discover the treasures about you," put in Maria. "You ought to take advantage of this glorious autumn weather to hunt up the places of interest,

which are numerous enough, if you had some one to point them out.”

“I was not aware that you could boast of many lions,” he said, carelessly. “Judging from the appearance of the country, I should not be tempted to make many excursions.”

“Except into the glen towards the sea,” observed Maria quietly, without raising her head from her work, but watching him narrowly nevertheless.

“Yes, you are right,” he replied, in a cool unruffled manner, which quite dispelled their suspicions. “It is the only beautiful bit of scenery in the neighbourhood, and its beauty is enhanced by the contrast with the desolation above. I am fond of the valley, and it reminds me strongly of some parts of Ireland.”

“We are not quite destitute, however, of objects of interest,” remarked Maria, in a sentimental, guide-book manner. “About eight miles away on the mountain there are a number of cairns or graves of ancient British chieftains. Nearer here there is a

large hollow on the summit of a hill, and at the bottom a great circle of stones, where the fairies, the 'tylwyth teg' of the country side, are said to gambol. Just in the same locality there are several large caves in which lights are sometimes seen at uncanny hours of the night; and one of them, the farthestmost extremity of which has never yet been explored, is popularly supposed to communicate directly with the infernal regions. Have you ever heard of these places before?"

"Never," he replied, with great interest; "and I am extremely thankful that you mentioned the subject. I came down here expressly to find out anything interesting about the people and the country, and I was beginning to think that I had come to the wrong place, and that it would be necessary to make a move elsewhere."

"You could not have chosen a better spot," said Maria; for her mother allowed her to monopolize the conversation, firstly, in order that she might make an impression,

if possible; and, secondly, because she herself knew nothing about antiquarian lore, and cared nothing for sentiment. “If you went to more populous parts of Wales, you would find the influence of the English language so rapidly increasing, that it has already almost obliterated in many places the manners and customs of the Welsh people. It is here in the wilderness, so to speak, that the primitive simplicity of the ancient Cymry is still in some measure to be found.”

She could talk well when she chose; but this was a favourite subject upon which she frequently descanted to her English friends, and there are but few persons who are such blockheads that they cannot talk upon some subject or other.

“I should very much like to see the places you have mentioned,” he said. “I have some friends in England who made me promise to send them some sketches of Welsh scenery, and hitherto I have not been able to redeem my pledge. I should like to

send them a view of the cairns you mentioned.”

“We will ride over there to-morrow morning, if you like,” she said with apparent indifference as to whether her suggestions were adopted or not. “It is a pleasant morning ride, and I frequently go there to commune with the spirits of the mighty dead,” she added, with a laugh.

“Nothing could give me greater pleasure,” he said, eagerly, not dreaming that he himself was forging the first link in the chain with which she hoped eventually to surround him. “What time shall we say?”

“About eleven,” she replied, sweetly, pleased to observe the animation with which he spoke. “We shall be back long before dinner.”

On his way home he met Mr. Campbell returning from a visit to one of his parishioners who had distinguished himself as a Radical, and whom the vicar had been ineffectually endeavouring to convert, and he invited him up to the Lodge. Mr. Camp-

bell gladly accepted the invitation, for it afforded him another opportunity to endeavour to bring Frederick into the ranks of the church militant.

Tea and other refreshments were brought up, and afterwards the gentlemen settled themselves down to smoke and to enjoy a quiet conversation.

“Miss Montessor has been telling me of some curious cairns and caves near here, and we are going to visit them to-morrow,” remarked Frederick. “May I ask if you have examined them?”

“Yes, I have,” was the reply, “and I have not the slightest doubt as to their genuineness. They are situated in a district which is now, and always has been, so far as we can judge, destitute of inhabitants, and they could hardly have been erected by imitators. I also find that several severe battles were fought in this neighbourhood between rival British chieftains, as it is almost on the border-land between North and South Wales. I think you will be very much interested.”

“ I presume that you have made the local antiquities a special branch of study ? ”

“ No, I cannot say that I have,” he replied. “ When I first came to Glynarth I thought, as you no doubt do now, that it was well adapted for a literary retreat. It is not the case. You may stagnate or vegetate, but you cannot work successfully here. People seem to spend their lives in a half-waking, half-dreaming state, and the spirit is, I fear, infectious.”

“ You find the place lively enough, I understand.”

“ Yes, in political and religious squabbles, which I am dragged into continually; but I was referring only to higher intellectual work.”

“ You are no doubt right,” said Frederick, thoughtfully; “ our minds and bodies are so weak that, in most cases, it requires a very powerful motive, and that ever present, to secure continued exertion. I would almost say that man is naturally lazy, but that there are so many exceptions to the rule.”

“And yet I feel that I am wrong,” continued Mr. Campbell. “I feel that I ought to make greater exertion in my parish than I do, for if ever there was a place in want of reformation, Glynarth needs it. Sectarianism is rife, chapels are numerous, and yet I think that true Christianity, in its purity and holiness, is at a very low ebb.”

“I suppose this is a fair specimen of a Welsh village?” said Frederick.

“Yes. In one and all of them party zeal and prejudice has swallowed up living religion,” replied the vicar, with a sigh. “Instead of doing good, we are pulling one another to pieces.”

“It was this intolerant, hateful spirit of strife that made me in the first instance renounce orthodox Christianity,” remarked Frederick. “Wherever I turn, whatever country or village I visit, I see nothing amongst professing Christians but narrow intolerance and bitter animosity—one sect fighting against another. Applying your own maxim of judging the tree by its fruits,

the system, as a system, has failed. If good has been done, it has been by individual exertion, and in isolated cases; but the great national Establishment and the numberless sects which teem in the country have utterly failed in their mission."

"Why have they failed?"

"Because they have been too fully occupied in advancing their own interests, at the expense of everybody else, to care about the interests of the people. The Church of England, for instance, has had magnificent endowments in her possession—the education of the country, the wealth, rank, I might almost say the genius of England, in her hands for centuries. What has she done with these splendid advantages? She has been for generations past blind to the truest and noblest interests of the people, whilst her ministers have been surrounding themselves with the good things of this world. It is all very well to pay a poor wretch of a schoolmaster a pittance of sixty or seventy pounds a-year for driving your

Catechism into the pates of rustic clodhoppers, who are taught that they ought to renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world when they never had the option of retaining or renouncing them. But these rustics and their unfortunate teacher might well gape with astonishment when they see a lord spiritual, with four or five thousand a year, clothed in purple and fine linen. Has *he* renounced the pomps and vanities of the world? ”

“What remedy would you propose for this state of things, which certainly does exist? ” asked the vicar.

“I have no remedy except the disestablishment of the church, and a more equitable distribution of its endowments,” replied the other. “It is not my object, however, to suggest a remedy at all, but merely to trace the train of thought which led me to endeavour to form a purely personal religion of my own. It is impossible for me to believe in a system which contains such monstrous and unremedied abuses.”

“You have made the same mistake which many others have made before you, my dear sir,” remarked the vicar, leaning back in his chair, and preparing to speak. “Because our Church happens to be encumbered with abuses and evils, which have been produced mainly by the ignorance and apathy of former generations, and because we cannot at once shake away these corruptions, you come to the conclusion that the spiritual life we profess is a sham.”

Frederick made a gesture of dissent, but the vicar went on,—

“No inference could be more erroneous. You must not suppose that, because these things exist, we do not feel their injurious effect—ay, and feel it deeper in our daily experience than outsiders can do;—but how can we remedy this? We are bound hand and foot by the present ill-arranged union with the State, and, practically, we are helpless.”

“Then of course you think that a dissolution of the union would be advisable?”

“By no means,” was the unhesitating reply. “Schisms and divisions have always existed, and always will whilst human nature is unchanged; but the union, if properly cemented and adhered to, would be an immense power for good. If only the Church were free to exercise some control over her own constitution, and dealt with generously by the State, it would be impossible to estimate the benefits which would accrue to the whole country.”

“You would rearrange the relations between the Church and the State, and not destroy them?”

“Yes, I would have them based upon mutual co-operation in the work of government,” replied the vicar, whose face was flushed with excitement. “No administration can rule the people, unless they are a loyal, well-disposed people, and it is as useless to expect the sun to rise in the night, as to look for loyalty in a godless nation. Even the heathen kingdoms of bygone ages were held together by religion, although it

was a false one; but if ever the State renounces and discourages Christianity, the prosperity and welfare of the kingdom will be speedily at an end. If the endowments given by pious individuals to the Church can be legally taken away by a mere Act of Parliament, the possessions of our Universities and Colleges will not be for one moment safe; if *their* property may be taken away also and applied to public purposes, private corporations will be the next sufferers; and as private corporations are made up of private individuals, the landowners will be the next victims. In fact, if the principle be once established, that property which was never bestowed by the State can be taken away by the State at pleasure, one of the great ties which hold society together will be broken asunder."

"It may be so," replied Frederick, who was carried away by the vicar's earnestness, even against his own conviction. "I fancy, however, that a dissolution of the union is inevitable."

“It may be inevitable,” was the reply. “It is so very much easier to find fault with existing institutions and to destroy them, than it is to devise new agencies to accomplish the work more effectually. With you, I think that those who are crying out for disestablishment and disendowment are playing with double-edged tools, which in the end will injure those who tamper with them.”

“I firmly believe that in the end dissenters, who are agitating in favour of this movement, will bitterly repent, because they can never succeed in their efforts without the aid of people destitute of religious convictions, but who will gladly assist in any work of destruction. At the same time I must say that I am strongly in favour of separation, complete and final, between Church and State. It would simplify matters and strengthen your position.”

“That is the argument continually used by my parishioners,” remarked Mr. Campbell; “for my own part, I believe that it

would take away from the clergyman that social status which is so useful to him in dealing with rich and poor; and we are so situated at the present moment that we cannot afford to lose any existing agency for good, because their united power is too small to cope with the depravity of the age. Instead of being destroyed, existing institutions ought to be strengthened.”

“I see the fundamental difference of opinion between us, Mr. Campbell,” observed Frederick. “You think that social status is an advantage to a clergyman. I am of quite a contrary opinion. Faith to overcome the world must be vested in men who do not love the high places of the earth, although educationally, morally, and spiritually fitted to occupy them. They ought to be men of the highest culture, free from the cant of the lower lights of dissent—many of whom clamour for disestablishment in the vain hope that it will elevate them in the scale of society—and men who believe so thoroughly in their mission, that for the

sake of it they are prepared to renounce earthly greatness. Simple-minded men of this mould would do more for the Gospel and for the Church than all the cardinals and bishops who ever wore mitres."

His pale earnest face glowed with enthusiasm as he spoke.

"And you, who can take such a view of the Church's mission, are you really an unbeliever?"

"Not an unbeliever in Christianity, but only in your interpretation of it. When I see the results of your teaching, and the endless strife going on in this parish, which I believe are quite contrary to the pure spirit of Christianity, I am compelled to conclude that you have failed to grasp the true meaning of the Bible. I am waiting for the advent of some moral force which will put an end to these dissensions, but the human mind must be greatly developed before it can be brought into action."

"It never will be so developed," said the vicar. "Enthusiasts have hoped, have

dreamed of it for ages, but it has never come. I cling to the unchangeable rock of the Church; but the whole human race will be turned into dust before your dream is fulfilled."

"I do not think so," was Frederick's reply. "The creative power of the mind has increased wonderfully during the present century. Science can scarcely be said to have existed a few brief years ago—almost so few, that men now living can reckon them—and see what triumphs it has achieved. Man *may* in time master the forces of nature, but whether he does so or not, the intellectual life of the world will be of a far higher nature than it is now. Christianity, freed from the trammels of creeds and formularies, will become a living power in the future history of the world, and not a theme for theological gladiators as it is at present."

The vicar rose to go, and his host walked out into the open air with him. The stars were twinkling brightly above them, and

the moon poured down a stream of silvery radiance on the placid bosom of the sea, which stretched away until it was lost to view in the darkness beyond. The village, which was a little below the lodge, was still and quiet, for the inhabitants were wrapped in slumber. On every side was perfect peace, a great hush, which pervaded earth and sea; and for a moment they lingered upon the moonlit lawn.

“My dear friend,” said the young clergyman, softly, laying his hand on Frederick’s arm, and speaking almost in a whisper, “*you* may wait in the vain hope of seeing the advent of an ideal religion. *I* am satisfied with the one I have now in my reach. I have a father and mother and other dear friends sleeping in yonder churchyard, and I have had my share of earthly sorrow; but when I gaze upon a scene like this—all nature sleeping beneath the protecting wing of an ever-watchful Father—all my little doubts and troubles are dispelled, for He who watches over a world of helpless beings

will surely protect me. I prefer to cling to Him and to the Church which He has established, rather than appeal to the perplexing wisdom of philosophers.”

With a silent grasp of Frederick's hand, he went away, and his friend returned to his study, where he remained above an hour absorbed in deep thought.

“A well-meaning man, blinded by the authority of the Church, and deeming it necessary to fight everybody on her behalf,” he mused.

Nevertheless the parting words of the clergyman made a deep impression upon his mind, and when at last he took his candle to retire to rest, he was filled with better and holier thoughts than he had experienced for a long time.

The servants had all retired to rest, and throwing open his window he gazed out into the night. Not a single light could be seen glimmering anywhere, except the bright orbs revolving silently in space; a deep stillness had descended upon Glynarth,

and as he stood musing he murmured to himself,—

“Is there no peace for the soul as well as for the body? The God who gave a rest to the one has surely appointed some means to secure the other. Perhaps my dream is only a dream, and that whilst man is imperfect outward religion will be imperfect also. I wish I could believe it,” and with a sigh, he closed the window.

At that moment Maria Montessor was sitting in her room, before a fire, knitting her brows angrily. She had just heard that Mr. Danvers had been at the Glen for some hours that morning, and she was extremely angry and alarmed.

“It must be stopped,” she muttered. “Mamma’s scheme must be adopted directly, whatever it may be. That milksop of a brother of hers must be disgraced, and I must force Mr. Danvers into a declaration. He must be induced to believe that she gave him up of her own free will, and then he will be too proud to ask her again,

if he has done so already, as I believe he has. I shall draw him on then, and matters can be easily arranged."

Not so easily perhaps, Miss Montessor. Planning an undertaking is a much easier matter than actually executing it, especially in love, where people persist in going in the wrong direction; and if Maria could have seen a short distance into the future, she would have hesitated a little before entering upon this intrigue.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

EDWARD HUGHES was not doing well at Abernant—that was pretty certain soon after his arrival there. His uncle, the lawyer, had not taken kindly to him, and the immediate consequence was, that the youth sought the pleasures of society in questionable companionship. This was the case before Mrs. Montessor commenced the task of hastening his downfall; and rumours, which no one could trace to their source, but which were nevertheless in everybody's mouth, were circulated in Glynarth respecting him. A man may perform the noblest actions he chooses, and but few will talk about him; but when he is

on the downward path, people are ready enough to push on the wheels which whirl him to destruction. *Talis vita est.*

He had not fulfilled his promise of sending his address to Frederick, and when that gentleman first heard the disquieting rumours which were floating about, he took his hat and stick, and prepared to set out for the Glyn, in order to consult Annie, for he was fond of consulting her on every pretext. He was in a deeply-shaded part of the road, and almost at the bottom of the valley, when he suddenly came upon Mr. Darby. The reverend gentleman tried to appear as abstracted as usual; but his cheeks were a little flushed, and his manner betrayed suppressed excitement, which indicated that something had happened to disturb his equanimity. He was coming from the direction of the Glyn also; but the philosopher evidently triumphed over the man, and he began, as he drew near:—

“It is a curious fact, a fact which every-day experience testifies to, Mr. Danvers,

that small women always marry tall husbands, and *vice versâ*. Whenever you see a very tall man, you may conclude *a priori* that his wife is a very short woman. It is difficult, you will agree with me, to explain so remarkable a phenomenon, unless it be owing to a feeling of pride on the part of the small wife, that she is the mistress and proprietress of a fine specimen of physical manhood. This theory, however, must be modified——.”

And then, suddenly remembering that he had not formally greeted Frederick, he exclaimed, “Good morning, sir;” and went on with his remarks :—

“Must be modified, sir, in the case of a little man who marries a tall woman. He feels a natural pride that he has conquered, so to speak, the affections of a fine and commanding woman, when she, in all probability, married him because no one else proposed. I cannot explain this interesting point otherwise.”

“Did it never occur to you,” asked

Frederick, with a merry twinkle in his eye, “that the smallest states are always the most powerful? Sparta, Macedon, Athens, Rome, Carthage, and, in modern times, England and Prussia, were all states small in area and in population, but still they ruled and rule the world. Perhaps it is owing to the fact that all the energy and power of the people could be readily developed, and better discipline enforced than in larger kingdoms or countries; but, whatever may be the cause, the fact is undeniable. Small states have crushed the mightiest kingdoms of the earth, and I think you might account for the social phenomenon you mention on precisely the same principle. The smaller a man or woman may be, the fuller they are of energy and ability, so that they generally succeed in any object they may take in hand; and, as they feel their own physical insignificance, they select the finest specimen of humanity they can meet with in the opposite sex. Perhaps this view meets your difficulty?”

“Perfectly, my dear sir,” said the delighted minister, with a radiant face. “You are a man of mind, sir, who can soar above the dead level of Glynarth, and I am proud to make your acquaintance. In the great domain of the soul we are kindred spirits, for it is remarkable that this very curious question occurred to both of us almost simultaneously.”

Frederick did not contradict him, although, of course, the explanation he put forth was more in jest than earnest. He was anxious, however, to reach his destination, and accordingly he put an end to the conversation.

“I must wish you good morning now,” he said, with a smile. “It reflects the greatest credit upon your powers of discernment that you should have grasped so obvious and yet so unstudied a question. Good morning.”

Mr. Darby went on his way rejoicing, and his friend proceeded to the Glyn.

Annie was at home—in fact she was very seldom away from home—and was attired in

the same simple black dress and shawl which she wore on a previous visit of his. Since her parents' death she always wore mourning, and she was one of those girls to whom mourning always appears suitable, and she knew it. Most girls have a particular costume which suits their complexion, although they make funny mistakes sometimes. I once knew a young lady who had an idea that yellow suited her, and as she was of the same hue as a guinea, she might have been right—in theory!

Annie, too, was a little agitated this morning. Could she have heard anything about her brother, he wondered.

“I am so glad you have come,” she said, as she opened the door. “I wanted so much to see you.”

“Why, my darling?” he asked, as he caressed her fondly.

“Because you have not been here for a very long time,” she said shyly, and blushing deeply, for she had not yet got over the exquisite sensation of having a lover.

“People say, too, that you are very devoted to Miss Montessor,” she added, timidly.

“My dear child, listen to me,” he said, very gravely, and seating himself in the easy chair. “It is as well that we should quite understand each other in reference to our future course. I do not wish you to become jealous in consequence of every idle report—and, Heaven knows, there are plenty circulating about this Arcadian neighbourhood—and believe everything you hear about me; and, on the other hand, I have the fullest confidence that you will be faithful to your part of our engagement. Servant girls and footmen may be always doubting and upbraiding each other, but sensible people—like you and I, Annie,” he added with a smile—“must not follow their example.”

She was silent, and did not even look up from that everlasting embroidery upon which she was always working. He noticed her embarrassment, and partly guessed the cause of it.

“Has Mr. Darby been here this morning?” he asked, believing that the minister had been renewing his suit. “I met him a little way up the road, and he seemed to be coming from here.”

“Yes, he was here for a long time,” and the heightened colour on her cheeks confirmed his suspicion, “and perhaps you ought to know his errand. He asked me to marry him.”

She spoke this latter part of her little confession with great rapidity and heightened confusion, for she feared lest she should break down in the middle.

“I am not sure that it was wise to tell me,” he said with a smile, which considerably reassured her, “although of course it does not matter in the least to me if Mr. Darby proposes every day, does it? You refused him, of course.” In his lordly Saxon superiority he had a supreme contempt for the Welsh minister, with his seventy pounds a year, and no expectations.

“Yes,” replied Annie. “I have refused

him at least half a dozen times before, and he still insists upon persecuting me with his attentions. I have even told him in a general way that I am already engaged, but he still persists, and this was my chief reason for telling you."

"I see only one remedy for it ; you must allow our engagement to become known. The two months you insisted upon are more than half gone, and I am strongly of the opinion that it is wrong to keep the matter a secret any longer. I am in favour of our good old English system, an open honourable transaction in the light of day, and I think the Welsh method which compels young people to meet in secret places at night, and which forbids all social intercourse between them, is a most injurious one—but here I am moralizing again. Everybody does it here, Annie, even your own sweet self ; it is something in the air I believe."

She laughed at this unlooked-for conclusion.

“We will adopt your English system, then,” she said, with another little blush, “announce our engagement as publicly as you like, if you think it ought to be made known.”

“I certainly do,” was the emphatic reply ; “I hate underhand work, even of this kind ; but I came here to-day about something else too, which I nearly forgot. Have you heard anything from your brother yet ? ”

He asked the question as carelessly as he could, but she took alarm in a moment. She knew better than any one else how weak he was, and how prone to fall into temptation, and her anxiety respecting him had been unceasing since that morning, when the carrier took him and his box away. Was he not her only brother, and what on earth had she to think about in that delightfully dingy old house, except her lover and her brother ? this brother who had been entrusted to her by one whose voice had long since been hushed in the awful silence of the tomb ! and if she failed in her duty towards him, how

could she ever expect peace and happiness herself? So the fair Welsh maiden reasoned, and it cannot be wondered at that Frederick's question made her start up in alarm.

“What have you to tell me about him?” she demanded, almost sharply, not heeding his question, and jumping to a conclusion, as all the dear creatures will do without the slightest reason for doing so, “is there anything the matter with him?”

“I merely asked whether you had heard anything about him,” he replied; “he has not fulfilled his promise of writing to me, and therefore I can't know anything about him.”

Why should he pain her with idle village gossip? If all the unpleasant rumours were true, or even a small proportion of them, she was likely to have trouble enough in a short time.

“I am sure there is something wrong,” she insisted, placing her hands upon his shoulders, and looking into his face with such an appealing expression, that the soft-

hearted fellow found it difficult to restrain himself from telling her something of what he knew; “you must have heard something. Tell me, Frederick, what is the matter?”

She had never called him by his Christian name before, and she half wondered at her own temerity in doing so, but her brother always loomed in the foreground to the exclusion of everything else.

“There is nothing the matter,” the deceitful fellow answered soothingly, and drawing her to his breast; “if you like I will go to Abernant to-morrow, and bring him away if he is in any scrape.”

Annie seized eagerly upon this proposition, and her fears were greatly relieved by the promise; but if she could have witnessed a scene which occurred that evening in Montessor House, she would not have spent so pleasant an afternoon, listening to Frederick’s words of love.

CHAPTER IX.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

IN the drawing-room at Montessor House two persons were seated in deep conversation—the lady of the house, and a man who was a stranger in Glynarth, a man who had once perhaps been handsome, but upon whose features the impress of dissipation and vicious habits was very evident. He was over forty years of age, how much more it would have been difficult to say, but he endeavoured to assume youthful manners and to preserve even a juvenile appearance in his dress. His attire was somewhat shabby and worn, and his fingers were decorated with a number of cheap rings, whilst a large Albert chain dangled from

his waistcoat pocket. If one had met him casually in a roadside inn, one might have supposed that he was a vendor of cheap jewellery or a travelling tailor—in fact he had been one and the other in the course of a rather eventful life. His small, cunning eyes and low forehead, his nose rendered more prominent than nature intended by strong drink, and his haggard, bloated face combined to make him an unpleasant person to contemplate. He was not a man who had seen better days, but one with whom life was a perpetual struggle to be regarded as a gentleman, but whose inherent vulgarity betrayed itself in every word, look, and gesture.

The lady sat in an easy-chair before the fire, and he had drawn his seat almost to her side, his arm resting carelessly upon the table. He had been waiting nearly an hour for her, and when at length she made her appearance he was not in the best of humours.

“You sent for me on urgent business,”

he began, sneeringly, as she took her seat, "and you show your sense of its importance by keeping me waiting an hour. Do you act in the same way towards every gentleman who calls upon you?"

"Not towards *gentlemen*," she replied, significantly. "Have you never disabused yourself of the idea that you have a right to such a name?"

"Not yet," he replied, "and perhaps before our interview is over, I may convince you that I am nearer it now than I have ever been before. Let us enter upon your business."

Mrs. Montessor rose, and going to the window, she drew the blind carefully down and then locked the door, for the mission which she was about to intrust to this man would not bear the free light of heaven. This having been done, she returned to her place.

"You have not quite forgotten the old times, Henry, when we first knew one another," she began, in a voice that was

intended to be tender, but which was quite thrown away upon her listener. "You know how badly off I was then, and that my marriage with Mr. Montessor was in every way a most desirable one, for it gave me wealth and power, which I still retain."

"Why do you remind me of all this, woman?" he broke out, fiercely; "why do you remind me of the mad love which I had for you then, and how completely you cast me aside when this rich man came between us? I have often thought, as I saw you in your carriage—*his* carriage rather—that I could have killed you without pity or mercy."

He was terribly in earnest, and she recoiled a little before him. Having no softness in her own heart she knew not how dangerous it was to play with this man's feelings.

"No, I do not wish to remind you of *that*," she said, soothingly; "it was merely for the purpose of asking your help in a matter of the very utmost importance to me. My husband, you must understand, held this estate, because it was supposed his uncle,

who died a few years before our marriage, died without issue; but the supposition was a false one, for a son was living, and is still, and he is now on his way to England to claim the estate. Henry, I have sworn by all that heaven and hell contain that he shall never wrest it from my hands ! ”

“ How can you prevent it ? ” he asked, moodily. “ If he proves his claim, you must submit.”

“ I hardly expected such a silly speech from you,” was the angry reply. “ I thought that you were rather more shrewd than other people; but you can see but little farther than your nose, after all. He can prove his claim—at least, I believe he can—for the necessary papers are in England; nay more, in Glynarth, a few miles from here.”

“ Burn them, then,” he said, irritated by her taunts. “ You are so remarkably clever that I should not have thought it necessary to suggest so simple an expedient. Burn them, and his claim is disposed of at once.”

“It is almost impossible to get at them,” was the more quiet reply, for it was useless to pursue this system of mutual recrimination when she needed his aid. “They are in the hands of an old woman who has no definite idea as to their immense value to me; but she *has* an idea that, if they fall into my hands, I shall make some improper use of them. She would not give them up to me, and in consequence of her refusal, I threatened to tear down her hut; but of what benefit would such a measure be to us? On the contrary it would drive her to seek refuge elsewhere—it would be more difficult for me to obtain access to her. She has even refused to show them to me, and I can therefore only guess as to their contents. There is a baptismal certificate, I believe—the only one existing—for I tore out with my own hands the leaf from the register in Glynarth church. There must be a description of some peculiar marks, if any, by which the child may be identified, and what else there may be I know not. This much is

certain, I must have these papers at any cost."

"But how can you get them?" he asked, curiously.

"You must procure them," was the emphatic reply. "I sent for you to-day to make you an offer. If you can procure them by fair means, or by foul, I will give you a cheque for five hundred pounds; if you fail, for one hundred."

"You forget, madam, that I am a gentleman," he began.

"A gentleman!" she laughed, with bitter scorn; "a man who commenced life as a jockey, and who has been everything from a horse-chaunter to an old clothes' man for the last twenty years, living on villany and swindling of all kinds! Nothing has been too mean or disreputable for you to be mixed up with; and if hell itself contained a five pound note anywhere, you would go down into the depths of perdition to find it. I know you too well, Mr. Henry—too well to be blinded by empty words."

He smiled with gratified pride. If she had told him that he was a greater scoundrel than any that ever strained a hempen cord, he would have been highly flattered.

“If I am so great a rascal as you make me out to be, I must be better paid than the mere song you mentioned, only ten ponies! I am astonished that a *lady* should have made such an offer. Make it a thousand and two hundred, instead of five and one hundred, or else I am off.”

“Do it for what I have offered, or not at all,” she replied—“in fact, I should have expected you to do it for nothing, after all that has passed between us.”

“All that has passed between us!” he echoed, with a derisive laugh. “What *has* passed between us that you should be so eager to recall it? Is it the memory of the fervent love you once professed for me, and the sudden change in your conduct when this rich man offered you marriage? I have not forgotten the bitter, taunting words with which you favoured me, when you told me

that you had never loved me, and that the whole affair was foolishly absurd, and ought to be buried from sight amongst the other follies of youth. It would be better for you if you had never recalled the miserable story. You have no claim upon my gratitude in the past; but, on the contrary, there is much that some men might find it difficult to forgive."

"But you will forgive it?"

"Not in the sense that you would wish me to forgive," he replied. "You wish me to do your disreputable work free of expense to you, whilst you reap the advantage, and I have no intention of doing so. If you want these papers, you must pay me a thousand pounds for them, or else you will not see them."

Other women more educated and refined would have shrunk from this plain-spoken ruffian; but she was accustomed to deal with such characters, and therefore was not alarmed. Neither did she feel any repugnance towards him. She regarded him

simply as an unscrupulous man, who could render her good service, and she much preferred paying a thousand pounds, in order to keep the estate, rather than lose all her revenue.

“Your price is a heavy one,” she said, endeavouring to beat down his demand—“it is exorbitant. I have already offered you a fair price, and unless you choose to accept it, I must find someone else who will do the business for me.”

“You forget that you have told me the story,” he said, coolly. “What if I felt disposed to procure them on my own account?”

“Of what possible use could they be to you?” she asked; but there was a cold feeling of terror in her heart as she heard his insolent question; for she had now a new enemy to encounter scarcely less dangerous than Edmund Montessor himself.

“It is hardly necessary to explain that,” he said, with a sneer, rising as he spoke and leaning upon the mantelpiece, whilst his small eyes were fixed upon her face. “You

can see well enough that, unless you were disposed to come to terms for them, the other side might be less obstinate.”

“ We need not discuss what the other side might or might not do,” she answered, coldly. “ You shall have the money you ask for when you bring me the papers. And now there is another subject upon which I wish to speak to you. You are residing at Abernant for the present, are you not ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Very well ; a young man named Hughes has gone there from this neighbourhood. I think he is a little wild and dissipated—just like yourself—and you will have no difficulty in making his acquaintance. Keep an eye upon him, for I may have something to tell you about him ; and in the meantime, if you do make him a little drunk now and then, well and good. Do you understand me ? ”

Yes, he understood that there was another scheme in the wind, as he expressed it ; and he resolved to find out all about it before he left Glynarth. He had a decidedly inquisi-

tive mind, ever bent on the acquisition of new stores of knowledge, a man of the mould from which great scholars and scoundrels are alike made, both equally bent on acquiring information, but information of a somewhat different kind. Henry Emmerson was a useful ally, but a dangerous one when it suited his interests to desert his employers.

“When am I to begin this little job?” he asked; “and you have not yet told me where the old woman lives.”

“You must go to work to-night,” she replied. “The sooner it is done, and you are out of the neighbourhood, the better. As for the place, I will show you the way myself. You had better get some refreshment and prepare for the night’s work.”

He left the room by one door just as Frederick entered by another, which had been left unlocked.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. MONTRESSOR MEETS WITH A REPULSE.

THE lady was rather startled by this unexpected visit, for she was under the impression that she had guarded sufficiently against intrusion.

“I could find none of the servants about, Mrs. Montessor,” he said, pleasantly, “none, except a kitchen-maid, who directed me here. I hope I am not intruding upon you; but I wished to say that if Miss Montessor chooses, we will ride over to the cairns on the first fine day—to-morrow if the weather changes;” for it had been wet and stormy.

“You are not intruding at all,” said the lady, sweetly; “and Maria will be happy to

accompany you. Unfortunately she is out just now, and she will be very sorry when she finds that you called in her absence. She was speaking of you this morning."

He would have been greatly surprised if he had heard that conversation.

"Miss Montessor is extremely kind," he said, feeling it necessary to say something.

"I am afraid that you visit down at the Glyn oftener than here," she remarked, with a perceptible tinge of scornful reproach in her voice. "I believe that you admire Miss Annie Hughes very much."

This was rather a free-and-easy mode of address he thought, and one that he did not like, and determined to put an end to the annoyance.

"Very much, madam," he said, quietly.

"She is rather a nice girl, as country girls go," was the gracious remark of the lady; "for my own part I see nothing unusual to admire in her."

"I admire her so much that I have asked her to be my wife," he said, gravely; "and she has accepted my offer."

The lords of the Philistines must have felt rather faint, I imagine, when their temple came tumbling in upon them, and the same feeling possessed Mrs. Montessor at that moment. Her indomitable courage, however, came to her aid; and perceiving that if she made any further effort to disparage the young lady he would be offended, she immediately changed her tactics.

“I am very glad to hear it, Mr. Danvers,” she said, with apparent frankness. “I am glad that your bride will be a Welsh lady, and that there is a prospect of keeping you here permanently.”

Temporarily crushed as her scheme was, she manifested no traces of the storm of passion which was raging in her breast, and her unsuspecting visitor pardoned her immediately. He liked her better at that moment than he had ever done before, so that Mrs. Montessor succeeded in blinding him as to the real state of affairs.

“When is the wedding to come off?” asked the wily lady.

“The time has not yet been fixed. I shall hurry it as much as possible.”

“Maria will be delighted,” said the good lady, “she will insist upon being one of the bridesmaids. Glynarth will be in a great state of commotion then, for it will be a red-letter day in our calendar.”

And so, with many protestations as to her delight and goodwill, she sent him away in the belief that she fully approved of his choice. Maria came in soon after his departure, and then her mother’s pent-up wrath burst forth.

“That fool Danvers has been here,” she exclaimed, “and he actually told me that he is engaged to Annie Hughes. It was disgusting to see how happy the poor fool appeared to be as he told me that he really intends to marry her. I could understand an intrigue between him and a girl of this kind; but as for marriage, I would never believe it, unless I had heard it from his own lips.”

The woman’s mean and cruel nature dis-

played itself in her passionate utterances. Even Maria, callous as she was, shrank from her in dismay.

“There is nothing for it but to fight it out to the end,” said her mother, resolutely; “we are driven to fight for everything, even for the very bread we are eating, and I am quite desperate. We shall have a hard struggle here; but this marriage I swear shall never take place.”

“Never, mamma!” cried her daughter, whose spirit was rising to the fray. If she missed this chance, when should she have another? That was the view she took of the matter, and it nerved her for her work.

“You must pretend to be deeply interested in the engagement,” continued her mother; “you must flatter and be kind to him—kinder than ever. Do not allow him to suspect for one moment that we have been disappointed; but let things go on just as they are, and do your best to gain the confidence of both. You ought to go down to the Glyn to congratulate this girl.”

“And you, mamma?” asked Maria, “what are you going to do?”

“I cannot tell you now,” was the rather gloomy reply. “I have work enough on my hands for half a dozen people, and I want a little repose. Go and dress for dinner, or amuse yourself as well as you can.”

Maria went away, closing the door behind her; and her mother stretched herself wearily on a couch, and endeavoured to sleep; but the effort was a vain one: her mind was teeming with plots and schemes, full of the dangers and difficulties by which she was surrounded, and rest was out of the question. She rose at length, and going to her room, she bathed her aching brow and eyes with water.

“This is fearful work, but it has been forced upon me,” she muttered; “it will kill me unless I get it over soon. It cannot last long, and after it is over there will be rest.”

When? That rest very seldom comes to a transgressor of every law, human and

divine; and in most cases is a hopeless dream. So she was fated to find it.

Mr. Emmerson did not of course appear at dinner, for Maria and most of the servants were unaware of his presence in the house. When it was over, Mrs. Montessor told her daughter that she was going out; and the young lady was sufficiently well trained not to ask impertinent questions as to the object of the journey.

Disguising herself in the same manner as upon a former occasion, and having summoned her companion, she stole noiselessly out of the house. Once in the shadow of the trees, she waited for the gentleman, who speedily joined her; and then in silence they pursued a private path which led to the high road. In a few minutes they had left the grounds, and were walking rapidly away from the village. Then Emmerson spoke.

“It is just the night for a job like ours,” he said, glancing up towards the sky, where heavy black masses of clouds obscured the

moon, and only a few stars could be seen in the dark expanse above.

“Yes,” she replied, with a slight shudder; “everything is so still, and there are but few people abroad even in the daytime, that our task ought to be an easy one.”

They did not speak again for some time. They almost dreaded to give utterance to their guilty thoughts in that solemn silence. An unseen Presence seemed to hover around them in every whisper of the night-wind and in every movement of the foliage; and as they drew near the spot where the old woman dwelt, Mrs. Montessor almost sickened with horror. Remorseful thoughts entered her mind, but she told herself that it was too late to withdraw.

They reached at last a point in the road nearly opposite to the hut. It was almost the very spot from which Frederick started in search of the shelter from whence the light proceeded on that evening when he first met Annie Hughes. Here they stayed their steps, and Mrs. Montessor seized her companion's arm

“Look down into the hollow,” she said, in a whisper, “you can see a faint glimmer of light through the darkness. There! it flashed out a little brighter then. Did you see it?”

“No, I see nothing,” he said, aloud; “nothing but darkness everywhere.”

“Hush! do not speak so loudly,” she exclaimed, terrified by the sound of his voice, which seemed to ring out clearly and distinctly in that wild solitude; “fix your eyes steadily on the hollow beneath us, and watch for a little while.”

He did so. Not a word was spoken; but Mrs. Montessor’s heart beat loudly under the influence of a vague, nameless fear, which was fast settling upon her spirit.

“I see it now,” he said, at length; “it glitters like a glowworm. Is that the place?”

“Yes, that is the hut, and there are the papers,” she replied, in an impressive whisper. “You must cross these fields, and walk straight towards the light. There are

no obstacles except the embankments, which serve for hedges. When you have reached the spot, you must adopt your own plans, in order to earn your promised reward."

"Is this the only way to the place?" he asked, preparing to start.

"No; there is a lane, the entrance of which we passed a little while ago; but if you went down that way, you might meet some one, and a man going there at night would be suspected immediately."

"But who could possibly see me?" he asked.

"There may be more eyes about the hut than you may imagine," she answered, still in a low whisper. "I forgot to tell you that the old woman is a Druid—a believer in that ancient and mysterious faith. Strange meetings, I am told, take place in her house. I have myself heard some extraordinary music proceeding from there."

After all, his one thousand pounds was not to be very lightly earned, he thought.

"It is well that you told me this," he

said, examining his pistols carefully; "it may be dangerous work."

"It is just possible," she replied, "though not at all likely. I have been several times in the place, and saw nothing unusual—only a few strange-looking ornaments. But precious time is passing away."

Roused by this hint, he adjusted his weapons, and dropped into the field.

"Wait for me here," he said, as he glided away amidst the shadows, "and if you hear anything unusual, make the best of your way homewards."

And in another moment Mrs. Montessor was alone in the night.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT WAS IT?

SHE could hear his footsteps as he crossed the field ; but when he entered the next she could hear nothing except the murmur of the wind. The moments seemed to move with leaden wings, and she could almost persuade herself that in that wilderness time itself had become motionless. Half an hour, however, passed away in this manner, and still she could hear nothing, see nothing except that flickering speck of light which she watched with straining eyes. Had he succeeded in securing the papers, or was he waiting there for a favourable opportunity? The uncertainty was agonizing, and she was about to set off in the direction he had

taken when she was alarmed by a startling noise.

The light had disappeared, but in the direction from whence it had issued came loud shouts and cries, mingled with sounds that seemed to be imprecations, and the hoarse murmur of men engaged in fierce strife. In that more than Egyptian darkness the alarming din struck the terrified listener's heart with fear, and her limbs shook with sudden dread. She stood there rooted to the spot, awaiting in helpless despair Emmerson's return. He came in a few minutes, speeding along the fields swiftly and noiselessly. It was not too dark to notice his pale, terrified countenance, and his trembling hands and voice.

"What was the matter, Henry?" she asked, as he came up.

"Matter enough," he said, with a hoarse laugh. "All the devils in hell are out on these hills to-night. Listen!"

High and clear above the murmur of the wind and the distant roar of the sea rose

that weird, unearthly music she had heard before, but more wailing and plaintive with its melancholy cadence. It was as if the spirits of the lost were holding an assembly in the hut, and uniting together in a long howl of despair. Emmerson stood for a moment listening to the melancholy strain, and then turning round to Mrs. Montessor, he exclaimed, in a voice trembling with horror and alarm, "The Druids!"

Before she could answer a word he had disappeared from her side, and fled away from the accursed spot, leaving her to wend her steps homewards as well as she could, and bitterly lamenting that she had ever embarked upon the enterprise, for it needed no word of his to tell her that he had not obtained the papers.

Let us follow his footsteps when he approached the hut. He found no difficulty in making his way over the fences and embankments which lay in his path. As he advanced the light also became clearer and more distinct, and as he approached

nearer to the spot, he became more careful and cautious. At length he reached the little enclosure which surrounded the hut, and ventured to enter it. It was so dark that there was but little danger of his being seen by anybody. He stole cautiously to the window, and peeped in. The old crone was sitting on the stool before the miserable peat fire, turning round occasionally and muttering some unintelligible Welsh jargon. He concluded that she was talking to herself, and from her his attention wandered to the poverty-stricken apartment. Upon the walls were the same curious ornaments which had attracted Frederick's attention, and upon the floor were skins and several ragged coats thrown down apparently at random. As he watched, Sian arose, and, going to a corner of the room, she dragged forth a mat, which she unrolled and spread upon the floor. Her next proceeding was to stretch herself upon this, without, however, extinguishing the candle.

“She can't go to sleep without putting

the light out, and I don't suppose she has fastened the door," he thought. "It looks like it, though. She's going off now."

After turning uneasily about for some time, the old woman sank into what seemed to be placid slumber. The spy at the window was puzzled by this, and still more so when he examined the door, and found that it was not secured except by a simple latch; but he came to the conclusion that the old woman expected a visitor, and that the candle was left burning until he made his appearance. It was very still now, both within and without the hut, and Emmerson thought it time to commence operations. He stole softly to the door, and, raising the latch, entered, closing it behind him, to exclude the night air. His eyes wandered rapidly round the room, and fixed upon an old cupboard as the probable place where the papers he was in quest of were concealed. He glanced at the old woman, and, believing her to be asleep, he stepped up to the cupboard, and found it locked. This

was but a trifling obstacle, for in a minute or two he had opened it by means of a bundle of keys he had brought with him. There was a heap of papers in the interior, and he was just about to transfer them all into the pockets of his greatcoat when the old woman started up and uttered a shrill cry of alarm. To bound over and seize her was the work of an instant; but the next moment he felt a hand at his own throat, and he was horrified to find the room full of men dressed in quaint fantastic costume. Emmerson had sufficient presence of mind to extinguish the candle, and then a violent struggle commenced. He shook off the grip of his first antagonist, and, drawing forth one of his pistols, fired directly at the door, which he knew was guarded by one of the new comers. A deep groan and a heavy fall told him that the shot had taken effect; and, in order to draw off the attention of his unseen assailants, he succeeded in changing his position the moment after he had fired the shot.

He rushed in the direction from whence the report proceeded; but in another instant, Emerson had flung open the door, and bounded away into the fields. To pursue him would be almost useless, and no effort, therefore, was made to overtake him.

“By Jove! that was the nearest touch I have ever had,” he muttered, pausing to wipe away the streaming perspiration from his brow. “The upsetting of the candle was the luckiest thing I ever did; for my business would have been settled before this but for that little event. Where on earth did those fiends come from? Dressed in skins and something else, I thought they were——. The place must be bewitched.”

He had nearly recovered his breath, and, therefore, resumed his flight to the spot where he met Mrs. Montessor. He was not quite sure as to whether the beings he had seen and felt were human or not; but when he heard that dreary, soul-chilling strain of music, he was convinced that no earthly agency could have produced it. A

terror such as he had never experienced before seized him, and he fled away from the evil-omened place.

He betook himself to the grounds of Montessor House, and, concealed among the shrubbery, he awaited the coming of the lady. Her alarm had not been a whit less than his; but fear absolutely prevented her from fleeing as he had done. The mournful cadence died away in quivering, discordant notes before she had gone far; and, as she left the scene still further behind, her spirits revived, and her courage began to return. Still she could not account for the extraordinary events of the night, and she longed to hear from Emmerson's own lips a report of what had occurred.

When she entered her own grounds he came forth from his hiding-place. She motioned him to follow her, and then led the way to her own room, where a bright fire was burning, and supper had been laid for her. She invited him to partake of it, and together they sat down before the

cheerful blaze, and now that she was no longer in solitude and gloom, her spirits rose wonderfully. She found it easy to be courageous when she had nothing to fear, and she even laughed at the dread which had hung so heavily over her a few moments before.

“You are a weak, cowardly idiot,” she said, addressing Emmerson with supreme scorn; “you would run away if a cat hissed at you in the darkness. I need not ask you whether you have the papers?”

“No; I have not got them,” he answered, moodily, for the light and warmth had not produced the same effect upon him. “I believe I saw them, but I would not go through such another scene as that of to-night for ten thousand pounds. It is all very well to laugh at it, but if you had been there, surrounded by men or devils—I don’t know which, perhaps both—you would hardly laugh at the affair as you do.”

He told her the story, and he could see that she was impressed by it. She sat

staring intently into the glowing embers, apparently lost in thought. She was trying to account for the sudden appearance of these men, in order to divest it of its supernatural aspect.

“There were skins and other things lying about, you said,” she observed; “these men were concealed beneath them, I am sure. Their dress was nothing more than the peculiar garb of these fanatics.”

“But what were they doing under the skins?” he asked, “even supposing they were there, and I am sure they were not. If they had known of my coming, we might account for it; but it is quite inexplicable as it is.”

She could not unravel this point, and he was not altogether certain that his recent adversaries were human beings.

“This is intolerable folly, Emmerson,” the lady exclaimed, angrily; “and you are becoming quite childish. Do ghosts grip their enemies by the throat, and groan and fall when a bullet is put into them? You

have had sufficient proof that you were striving with flesh and blood. Don't talk such ridiculous nonsense any more."

He was silenced, though not quite convinced; and she advised him to retire for the night.

"Be in the garden at seven to-morrow morning," she said; "you must leave here directly afterwards, lest your presence should be noticed. I will decide upon something by then."

Clearly Mrs. Montessor did not allow the grass to grow beneath her feet, in fighting for her daughter and for her estate.

CHAPTER XII.

FREDERICK'S MISSION.

FREDERICK was on the road at an early hour next morning, speeding onward as fast as a powerful horse could carry him to Abernant, in order to fulfil the promise made on the previous day to Annie. His way lay along the sea-side for the whole of the twenty miles he had to travel. Sometimes it wound along the base of high and precipitous rocks, at others upon the brow of cliffs overhanging the sea. For a part of the road he was riding was above the ocean, which was spread out before him, tinged with the golden hue of the morning sun, whilst far away in the distance, lying beneath the horizon, were the hills of North Wales

and the Carnarvonshire and Merionethshire coasts, studded with tiny would-be-fashionable watering-places, and rising abruptly as it were from the depths of the sea. It was a sight which would have moved a less enthusiastic lover of nature than he was, and frequently he reined in his horse that he might contemplate at leisure the lovely scene.

With these and other interruptions his journey was not accomplished until nearly noonday, and as he rode into the town he perceived, from the unusual number of people who were flocking in, that it was market-day. Old and young women, wearing beautifully clean white caps surmounted by high peaked hats, were carrying baskets filled with butter and eggs for sale; and rustic swains, dressed in suits of home-made cloth, were strolling about, stopping occasionally to interchange greetings with their female acquaintances. The stalls, upon which meat, greengroceries, and other articles were exposed for sale, were placed

in the streets, and round them the smartly-dressed country-folk clustered. Welsh greetings of “Sut yr y’ch chwi heddyw,” * and “Boven da i chwi” † were freely interchanged, and the people stared curiously at the strange horseman who rode slowly along; the general expression of opinion being that he was a “gwr dieithr o Sais” (an English stranger), although no very great amount of erudition was necessary to make this discovery.

He wended his way up to the principal hotel, where he left his horse and made inquiries as to Edward’s place of business—or rather, his uncle’s. He found that this gentleman was a well-known municipal luminary, and he had therefore no difficulty in finding his house. It was situated in the principal thoroughfare of the town, and presented a very comfortable appearance, as if the owner was a remarkably prosperous man. Into this place Frederick entered, and inquired for Edward, but was told by

* “How are you to-day?” † “Good morning.”

one of the clerks that he was not in just then.

“When do you expect him?” asked Frederick.

“I really don’t know, sir,” replied the clerk, “but I can ask the principal.” And in a few minutes he returned, asking Frederick to step up to the lawyer’s room. Edward’s uncle was a man who enjoyed a considerable practice, although he was not at all a clever lawyer. He was a middle-aged, pleasant old gentleman, of great influence in the town, and he often succeeded in settling by private arbitration cases which would otherwise have involved considerable litigation. People were therefore eager to intrust their disputes to him, in the hope that he would conduct them peacefully out of their troubles, where younger lawyers would see no other remedy but costly litigation. In some things he was a hard man, and this was particularly the case where his money was concerned. He never spent a penny unnecessarily, and

he held aloof from most of his relatives lest they should trouble him for pecuniary help. He was in fact a well-meaning, kindly man, but somewhat of a miser in disposition. He was greatly impressed by Frederick's appearance and manners, for hitherto he had been under the impression that everyone who lived at Glynarth was fifty years behind the age in everything.

"Will you take a seat, sir?" he said, rising and placing a chair for his visitor. "I am told that you are a friend of Edward's, and reside, I think, in Glynarth?"

"Yes, for the present, I do," was the reply; "and I am his friend, because I take great interest in him and his sister, and would do anything in my power to benefit him."

"How long have you known him?" asked the lawyer, as if cross-examining a witness in court.

"Not very long," replied Frederick; "I came down to Glynarth only a month or six weeks before he left. But allow me to ask

you whether he satisfies you in his conduct and attention to his work ? ”

“ I will be frank with you, my dear sir,” said the old gentleman ; “ he is certainly not doing well, for, in fact, he leads a very dissipated life. Whenever he gets money he spends it very recklessly, and I am compelled to pay his bill at his lodgings before I allow him to have the rest of his salary. he is a gambler, too, I am told ; and indeed, if he were not my nephew I would dismiss him in a moment. He is going to destruction with a run.”

Frederick was greatly shocked to hear this confirmation of his worst fears. The youth was evidently breaking through all restraint, and if a dread of his uncle's displeasure had not sufficed to deter him from his evil practices, it was not likely that the influence of a comparative stranger could be of much avail.

“ Where is he now ? ” he asked, after a pause.

“ At his lodgings, perhaps—or in a beer .

shop, somewhere," replied the lawyer; "he complained that he was not well this morning, and his eyes were bloodshot, and his hands trembling, as if he were on the verge of an attack of delirium tremens, so I allowed him to leave the office; but I am afraid that he is drinking with some of his bad companions."

"But, my dear sir," objected Frederick, "he has not been here above six or seven weeks, and if he drank day and night during that time, he would hardly be so near delirium tremens as you seem to think."

"The evil was more than half done when he came here," said the old gentleman, with a solemn shake of his head; "he must have been drinking in secret before he left home, and this dissipation here has nearly finished him. I really am at a loss to know what to do with him."

Frederick rose to go.

"I will find him out and speak to him," he said, drawing on his gloves; "if nothing else will do, he must be sent away some-

where, but I should not like to see him at home again ; it would break his sister's heart."

"She is a very good girl, I believe," remarked the lawyer.

"She deserves a better brother, sir," was the grave reply. "A nobler or purer girl never breathed; and when she hears this story—which shall not be told unless it is absolutely necessary—it will cause her the deepest pain and sorrow."

"What an ungrateful scamp the fellow must be," observed the lawyer, as he escorted his visitor to the door. "There is a craving for drink so deeply rooted, I fear, that it cannot be counteracted. It is a hopeless case; but let me know what you intend doing in the matter."

Frederick promised to do so, and then went in search of the lodgings which Edward occupied. They consisted of a couple of rooms in a detached house a little out of the town. It was a clean, respectable-looking place; and the landlady who answered his

knock was a pleasant, kind-hearted old lady, who spoke English with a decided accent, and whose whole appearance showed her nationality. She was, in a word, a type of the better class of Welsh matrons.

“Is Mr. Hughes at home?” asked our friend, when the door was opened.

“Yes, sir,” she replied, promptly; “he’s lying down, not quite well, with a bad headache, sir.”

She would have told him all about her lodger if he had cared to listen, for she was brimming over with gossip and good humour.

“Take this card in,” he said, “and tell him that I am waiting to see him.”

She did as she was bidden, merely stopping for a minute at his door to spell out the name of the visitor; and when Edward read the name, he jumped up from the couch upon which he was reclining, and hurried to the door.

“This is a surprise, indeed,” he said, as he led Frederick upstairs. “I certainly did not expect to see you at Abernant. What

could have induced you to leave the sylvan retreat of Glynarth for this noisy abode of men? ”

He was trying to be gay, but it was a miserable failure. His eyes *were* bloodshot, and his hands trembled, as the lawyer had said, and he looked more like a broken-down debauchee than a youth of nineteen or twenty, who a few weeks before had been residing in that quiet farmhouse in the glen.

“I may as well tell you the truth, Edward,” said Frederick. “I came over here to see you.”

“You are very kind,” was the nervous reply, for he dreaded what was coming. “I am very sorry that I forgot to send my address as I promised. It was quite an oversight.”

“That was not the only promise you forgot, I fear,” said Frederick, very gently, but gravely. “You promised a few weeks ago to keep away from temptation, and to strive to do well here. I ask you, how has that promise been kept? ”

He hung his head in shame and silence.

“I have been to the office, and your uncle told me a sad tale of foolish misconduct and reckless disregard for your own interests and everyone else’s,” pursued Frederick, “a tale that I hoped never to hear of your sister’s brother. What will *she* say when she hears that her only brother has become a confirmed drunkard and gambler before he is twenty years of age? What are you to do in the years of manhood if this is the beginning? Where do you imagine your present course will terminate? and has it made you happier than you were before you entered upon it?”

He spoke very earnestly, thinking of the fair girl in her secluded home, who loved this wretched boy before him.

“Happier!” he groaned, and he covered his haggard face with his hands. “God knows! it has not. I was never more miserable in my life.”

“Give it up, then,” pleaded Frederick; “a man must be a slave indeed if he cannot

shake off a habit which is ruining him, soul and body. What pains me most deeply is the knowledge that your sister's anguish will be inexpressible when she hears of this."

"She must not hear it," exclaimed Edward, starting up in real alarm; "you would not be so cruel. I will never touch drink again, only do not tell Annie."

"My dear boy, rumours of your dissipated conduct are circulating through the whole neighbourhood. People are always readier to talk of a man's sins than his virtues, and your failings have been pretty freely discussed. As yet your sister has not heard these rumours, but how long she may be kept in ignorance I don't know. She may have heard it to-day."

"It will kill her," cried the miserable youth.

"And yet, knowing how deeply such tidings would affect her, you still persisted in your mad conduct. Edward Hughes, you never deserved such a sister, for brotherly love is utterly worthless unless it has

some effect upon our lives, and is not confined to mere professions.”

Edward was silent, and Frederick went on :

“All your faults and errors when at home have been fully canvassed,” he continued, not heeding the pain he was inflicting; “they must have been widely discussed before I could have heard of them, for I never mix with the villagers at all. My valet told me some of the stories afloat, and would have told me a good deal more but that I checked him. Even your conduct here has become known, and I was almost compelled to tell your sister a little of the truth, but she has no idea of this—neither had I when I promised to her yesterday that I would come over.”

“How has it become known, I wonder?” muttered the youth angrily.

“How?” echoed Frederick. “These things are carried about, as it were, by the winds—they are passed from mouth to mouth, and from village to village. Evil tidings

proverbially travel fast, and you surely did not dream that you could keep it a secret. I am almost sure that everybody in Abernant has heard it, and, of course, people from Glynarth are constantly here. But it is useless to speak of this. It can matter but little to you to be publicly regarded as a rake—the only thing to be considered is what your future course is to be? Where do you intend to go ? ”

“ I shall remain here, of course,” he said, looking up with an alarmed expression on his face ; “ why should I leave ? ”

“ Because I fancy that your uncle will not tolerate this misconduct much longer,” was the quiet reply—“ in fact he told me this morning that if it had been anyone else, he would have dismissed him long ago. As it is, I can see that his patience is nearly exhausted ; and, when he dismisses you, which he is sure to do in a few weeks, may I ask what do you intend doing ? ”

He spoke in a quiet, almost sarcastic manner, which alarmed Edward still more.

“I do not know—I really cannot say,” he stammered; “do you think he will dismiss me?”

“Have I not said so?” was the quick reply. “He is not likely to acknowledge a nephew who disgraces him before the world, and you may regard it as certain, for it is merely a question of time. You will certainly be dismissed, and I should like to know what in that case your plans will be?”

This was a question by no means easily answered, and Edward tried in vain to escape from his accumulating difficulties. Ruin and disgrace stared him in the face, and he shrunk in horror from the natural consequences of his own folly.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STORM COMES.

FREDERICK'S manner was so uncompromising, and he seemed so positive that Edward's dismissal would eventually take place, that the young man was almost in despair. He felt that to return to Glynarth disgraced and branded with something very like infamy, would be intolerable to his own feelings and also to his sister's, and he had no other place in which to seek refuge. In a town, one unit of misery and shame is lost amid the crowd, but in a little country village people have ample leisure to discuss and magnify each other's failings. Now that the matter was placed fully before him, he saw that he had been deliberately ruining himself, and he could perceive no loophole for escape.

“You promised to be my friend, Mr. Danvers,” he said at last; “be so now; for no one ever stood in greater need of a real friend. What *can* I do? To go back to Glynarth would be simply impossible, and to remain here in idleness is out of the question. I do not see what can be done unless I blow my brains out, and Heaven knows I am ready enough to do that.”

“Do not invoke Heaven to witness anything so silly and stupid,” said Frederick, impatiently. “You have no one but yourself to blame for your present position; and as you have got into it yourself, you ought to get out of it unaided; for I can be of no real assistance to you unless you change your habits completely. Give up your present dissipated life; and I think I can venture to promise on your uncle’s behalf that not only will he not dismiss you, but receive you into his confidence and favour.”

“Very well, I will promise,” was the somewhat too ready reply.

“You may promise a dozen things in

your present state of mind, and break all your pledges when I am out of sight," said Frederick, seriously. "You must, at all events, remember that, if you still persist in drinking yourself to death, and in walking straight to utter and complete ruin, you are doing it now with open eyes. There is no chance of escape. Unless you become altogether reformed, you will be summarily dismissed, and you ought to know how much unhappiness that would involve. Do you understand your position?"

Yes, he thought he did; for he had sufficient discretion to see that he was on the brink of a precipice, and if he fell, he would never be able to retrieve his fortunes or regain his lost place in the world. Frederick had foreseen that self-interest would probably operate more powerfully upon his mind than almost any other motive; and he was right, although he might have come to the same conclusion in the case of everybody else.

Frederick promised not to reveal the

actual state of things to Annie unless he heard that he was still following the same course of misconduct; and after much friendly advice on the one hand, and solemn promises on the other, Frederick bent his steps again towards the office. Here he had another interview with the lawyer, and told him of his nephew's promised reformation, at the same time requesting him to write, unless the anticipated change took place. The old gentleman promised to do so; and with this understanding Frederick took his leave, and started on his homeward ride.

From that day an apparent reform took place in Edward Hughes's life. He was very regular in his work, punctual in his attendance at the office, and anxious to please everybody. He still had a somewhat dissipated and haggard look, but this was attributed to his former bad habits; and his uncle was highly pleased with this sudden and complete change in his nephew. He wrote to Frederick in terms of great satisfaction, and this letter was duly shown to Annie.

But this reformation was too sudden to be either real or lasting. The exigencies of his situation compelled him, not to put away his vices but carefully to conceal them. He never entered a public-house, and never touched a card, when strangers were present; but some of his boon companions could have told of orgies continued far into the night, and of heavy winnings and losses at cards. He contrived, however, to mask his misconduct so effectually that all except those connected intimately with him were completely deceived.

This was the state of affairs when a new actor appeared on the scene, in the person of Mr. Henry Emmerson, who was eager to execute Mrs. Montessor's designs. He readily succeeded in gaining admission to the circle of dissipated revellers to which Edward belonged, and from that hour the young man's downward path was a rapid one. His losses at play became heavier than ever, and his salary was quite inadequate to pay his very heavy expenses. He dared not

apply to his sister for money; and he refused most strenuously to follow Emmerson's insidious advice, and raise money upon his land. The plotter knew perfectly well that, being a minor, he could not legally do this; but he knew, also, that if he could be induced to do so, his sister would repay it even if she beggared herself in doing so.

He was desperately pressed for money, but he would not rob his employer. He was one of the family, and had been much kinder to him than he had at all deserved; and to defraud him of a penny would have been such gross ingratitude that even he could not descend to. Whatever might become of him, he could not injure those who had heaped benefits upon him, and he told Emmerson so clearly and distinctly; and that worthy failed completely to overcome his scruples. An event occurred, however, at this period which precipitated matters.

Edward was sitting before his desk one morning, feeling dispirited and moody, when he was summoned to his uncle's presence.

“Sit down, Hughes,” he said, gravely, as the young man entered. “I have some painful questions to put to you, which I must ask you to answer as candidly as possible, for your own sake.”

The young man’s face became deadly pale, and he staggered into a seat. Could his misconduct be discovered after all the pains he had taken to conceal it?

“We were all—that is, all your friends—beginning to hope that at last your habits had undergone a complete reformation, and promising ourselves much comfort in consequence. I was greatly shocked yesterday to find that this apparent change has been nothing more nor less than a systematic course of deceit and false pretences.”

The blow had fallen, and it was a crushing one,—so crushing that he could not utter a single word in reply.

“I never like to take an important step without considering it carefully first; and, therefore, I did not tell you of this yesterday,” continued his uncle. “It is my duty,

however, to tell you that I cannot allow you to remain here an hour longer. You have been trusted too completely as it is; and although I am very sorry for you, and still more sorry for your sister's sake and for your friends, I could not possibly permit you to stay."

"What proof have you of my misconduct?" he demanded, driven to desperation by his position. "It is a miserable calumny, which has been circulated by some of my enemies."

His uncle held up a tavern bill of recent date, which he had accidentally dropped.

"That is one proof," he said. "I have others here in a letter written, it is true, by an anonymous correspondent, but which contains indisputable evidence of your evil and wicked ways. Denial is quite useless, and can only add to your difficulties."

The questions he had mentioned had not been asked, but the young man did not notice this.

"Why should I be dismissed in this

way?" he said, angrily. "Whatever I may have done, I have done my duty in the office; and, as my employer, you have nothing more to do with me. Have I ever wronged you of a halfpenny? Examine my books, and see if I have appropriated one farthing of the money which was constantly passing through my hands. Whatever I may have done elsewhere, I have served you conscientiously, uncle; and yet I am to be ruined and disgraced by this sudden and most harsh dismissal."

"You may not have defrauded me of any money as yet," replied the lawyer, gravely; "you may not have been sufficiently tempted yet; but a gambler is never secure from temptation, and he may at any moment rob his employers. The time might come, and that before long, when you would be driven to so desperate a pass, that my property would not be a moment safe in your hands."

"Never!" he almost shouted, in his anguish and excitement.

“I cannot believe you,” replied his uncle, sadly. “You have proved yourself unworthy of an honest man’s confidence. From henceforth take your own course, whatever that may be. You have made your own bed and you must lie upon it.”

It was useless to plead for leniency any longer; and the young man passed out into the office, slamming the door angrily behind him. The chief clerk was sent for; and Edward knew well that his uncle was announcing his dismissal to him. He therefore took his hat, and went to his lodgings, to avoid the ignominy of a formal discharge.

His landlady saw that something unpleasant had occurred, and his return at so early an hour was also quite an unusual circumstance. He went to his bedroom, and threw himself upon the bed, with dark thoughts crowding thickly on his mind. He shuddered as he thought of his fearful position, and his heart sickened with dread as he tried to realize what his future would be.

“Lost—disgraced—ruined for ever!” he

murmured, with trembling lips, as he buried his face in the coverlet. He could not return home; he would prefer to face a hundred hungry tigers rather than meet the scorn and gibes of the villagers. He could not remain in Abernant. The townspeople would hear of his fall, and shun his society; and if he could brave this, where was the necessary pecuniary supply to come from? What could he do? What, indeed?

And in the meantime how sped the time with Annie—gentle, loving Annie? Fully occupied with her small household cares, and filled with the new, and yet old, happiness which had entered into her life, she was very happy. Her brother's supposed reformation added to her peace of mind; and her days and months, her weeks and nights, were a long period of uninterrupted happiness. She was loved by a true and noble man; and that one fact was enough to drive gloom and sorrow away from her heart. There was one man, at least, in the world for whom her face was more beautiful,

her voice sweeter, her eyes brighter, than those of any other woman,—a man in whom she had perfect trust, and upon whom she placed the most implicit reliance. How sweetly these days of early love glided away, with scarcely a passing shadow of care to dim their brightness! It was a new and hitherto strange bliss which gladdened her spirit; and under its wondrous influence her heart became lighter, her laugh more merry, and her days far brighter.

But it was not to last. Sorrow and trouble were very near that sylvan home,—very near, as they always are, in this world of clouds and shadows.

CHAPTER XIV.

DARK DOINGS.

THE Lady of Montessor House was sorely perplexed, for her horizon was darkening and her difficulties increasing. Edmund Montessor had actually landed in England, and in a few days would probably arrive to take possession of his property, so that it was but natural that she should almost be in despair.

She sat in her private room one evening, in an attitude of expectation. Some one was coming, and the lady was evidently impatient, for she rose frequently from her seat to listen for the footsteps which were long in coming.

They came at last, however. A man's

heavy tread was heard on the gravelled walk, and in a few minutes he appeared in the room. He was carefully muffled and disguised, but when in her presence he threw away his wrappers, and stood before her with his wonted smile and greeting, for it was Emmerson, her tool and confederate.

“How goes the time here?” he asked, rather roughly, helping himself as he spoke to half a tumblerful of brandy. “Any news about?”

“Yes,” she answered, quietly; “Edmund Montessor is in England.”

“Ah, well, your game is pretty nearly played out,” he said, carelessly; “he will easily obtain the papers we failed to get, and then his claim is established.”

He spoke lightly and indifferently, but he was watching her carefully, to observe the effect his words had upon her.

She sprang up in a moment—he almost thought she was about to spring upon *him*.

“It shall never be established—never!” she hissed between her closed teeth. “I

will kill him and myself also before he shall reign here instead of me. I will stop at nothing—hesitate at nothing—in order that I may defeat him. Do you think I am made of straw, you idiot?” she asked, angrily, as she observed the alarmed expression of his countenance.

“No; but you will get into mischief unless you curb your temper,” he said. “It is all very well to go into heroics about this matter, but it won’t do. You must look at it from a common-sense point of view. This man is in England: how can you act against him? You can do nothing—absolutely nothing.”

“Can I not?” she sneered, turning upon him so sharply that he drew back his chair from its place, lest she should come into collision with him. “Why did I send for you to-night, do you imagine? To talk and prate as you are doing now?”

Her barmaid experience, rough and ready as it had been, was useful in managing a character like his.

“I did not exactly know what your object was,” he answered coolly. “You are such an inexplicable woman that it is not safe to guess about your intentions and plans. I have found that out long ago.”

His manner was sarcastic, but she regarded the speech as a compliment, and she recovered, in a great measure, her good humour.

“I suppose there is no chance of getting at the papers?” she said, hoping that he would volunteer to make another attempt. “If we could procure them, it would save a great amount of trouble—perhaps even of life.”

“They are not in the hut,” he said, positively. “I called there last night; and finding no one in, I examined the place carefully. The cupboard and everywhere else were empty. There has been a grand clearance, and everything of value has been removed.”

“Was there any furniture left?” she asked.

“Yes; the stool and the table, nothing more,” he answered. “The door was locked, too—an unusual precaution in a Welsh mountain district. Altogether, it is quite evident that the old woman’s suspicions have been aroused, and she has removed the papers to some place of security.”

“If that be the case, we may look in vain for them,” she said, gloomily. “The Druids know the mountain fastnesses so well that they can hide anything they wish in the most effectual manner, and hold their strongholds against a regiment of soldiers, if necessary. We must use other means.”

“And those are——?” he asked, curiously.

“This man must not be allowed to enter Glynarth,” she said, emphatically. “If he comes, he will be recognized by a score of people, and he will no doubt discover some means of obtaining these all-important papers. We must stop him on the threshold of his enterprise, as it were.”

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“Before you tell me the means you propose to employ, let me ask you where the young man has been all this time?”

“He was carried off to America by his nurse, when his father and his companion went,” replied Mrs. Montessor. “Soon afterwards she ran away, taking him with her, in the hope, perhaps, of securing a handsome ransom; but the father died soon afterwards, and as nothing could be heard of the son, my husband took possession of the estate. One or two letters, received from her afterwards, fell into my hands, and you may guess what I did with them.”

“Burnt them, I daresay, or else you preserved them for Sunday reading,” he replied, with a cynical smile. “How did the nurse proceed when she found her letters unanswered?”

“She did not live very long after the boy’s father. She was stricken, I believe, by yellow fever, which was prevalent in that part of the States where she had taken up her abode. She died, and I hoped that the secret died with her.”

This was but one of the many vain hopes she had formed during her lifetime, and one after another they burst like so many air-bubbles.

“It was not so, however,” she continued. “She left a written statement behind, and this document was placed in the young man’s hands but a few days ago. Mrs. Hughes had long since disappeared—Heaven knows where. When he discovered his parentage, he came over at once, and is here in England, as I have already told you. This is not a time to allow the grass to grow under our feet. We must *act*.”

“Very good,” he said, placidly; “but *how* are we to act?”

“You must endeavour to intercept him before he reaches here,” she replied. “Intoxicate him—drug him—do anything to make him completely helpless, and then——”

She paused. The dreadful thought that was in her mind made her, hardened though she was, shudder.

“What then?” he asked, impatiently.

“*He must die,*” she said, in a distinct, hissing whisper.

Emmerson started from his seat, and paced up and down the room.

“You are a perfect she-devil,” he said, and his face was of an ashy hue. “Why should you take this man’s life and dip your hands in blood, the stain of which can never be washed away? It is a hanging business, too,” he added, abruptly.

“It is quite evident that the last fact is the only one which weighs against the project in your mind,” she said, scornfully. “You are growing sentimental under the influence of fear; but in reality there is no cause for alarm. One life more or less can make no difference in this over-stocked world, and perhaps the man himself would thank you after the blow was struck, because you had released him from his troubles. Human life is cheap, and it is wasted every day, so that we need not hesitate so much about putting one poor fellow out of the way.”

Villain as he was, he could not listen unmoved to her callous words, and his face became still paler and almost livid.

“If there is any other way of getting rid of him besides this, I should be only too glad to adopt it,” she continued; “but there is none. If *we* are to be safe, *he* must die: and for my own part, I am willing to run the risk.”

“You cannot strike the death-blow, and therefore no hangman’s noose will dangle over *your* head,” he answered, sullenly. “I shall have to run the risk, whilst you enjoy the fruits of my crime. It is not a fair bargain.”

“I shall be an accomplice,” she said, “and therefore liable to a long term of penal servitude. If it became known that I planned the crime, I should probably be shut up for life, and I would rather die at the hangman’s hands a dozen times over than spend a year in penal servitude; and yet you talk about my running no risk. Do you think that I should make so successful a

convict that you imagine it would be nothing if I were shut up for life? ”

“It is all very well to discuss a matter like this in your boudoir, before a cheerful fire, and with half a dozen lights burning,” he said, impatiently; “it is another matter to do the business, and you have no idea of the difficulties I should have to contend with.”

“I tell you, you dolt, that I would kill him myself, if I could do so when he had no power to struggle with me and overpower me,” she exclaimed, angrily; “and what is more, if you refuse to do it, I shall be tempted to try in any case.”

They were dangerous words to utter to a man who might one day be a witness against her; but she believed that he was wholly devoted to her service, and she was nearly certain that he would agree to help her in her dark design.

“You are a great woman—a very great woman,” he said, admiringly. “You ought to have been alive in Boadicea’s time, for

you would certainly have been commander-in-chief."

"It is not a fitting period to indulge in vain compliments, Emmerson," she said, coldly, although she was secretly pleased, for susceptibility to flattery was one of the weak points in her character. "Make up your mind on the subject. Will you help me or not?"

"What is the reward to be?"

"One hundred pounds a year for life," she said, slowly and distinctly, and watching the effect of the announcement upon him. He was evidently somewhat disappointed.

"A hundred a year!" he exclaimed, contemptuously; "you will make over two thousand a year by the transaction, and out of that I am to have a hundred. Your usual lavish generosity, Mrs. Montessor."

"Do not treat me to a long discourse on the value of your services," she said, quietly; "name your own price, and I will consider it."

He paused for a few minutes, gazing

intently into the fire. He was pondering the whole affair, and at length she saw by his brightening eye that he had fixed upon his price.

“It seems to me that our interests are too widely separated in this affair,” he said; “I am to incur most of the danger, and yet will receive the least advantage. This was the case also in the little transactions in which in past years I have been useful to you, and it must be so no longer.”

“How can you remedy it?” she asked, although her heart sickened within her as she read his answer and her fate in his face.

“If I commit this deed, *you must become my wife*,” he said.

He said no more, but she buried her face in her hands, and groaned deeply. She hated this man, as the designer of evil deeds always hates the instruments he employs, and yet he had the hardihood, knowing this, to ask her to marry him!

“I loved you once,” he said, in a voice which was far from being sentimental; “we

were engaged once, and had a deep regard for one another. Let the old dream be revived—it is the only offer I can make, and it is not a bad one. You will be released from a great deal of trouble, and would be much happier than you are now.”

As if a union cemented with human blood could be a happy one! As if she could ever sleep peacefully upon a murderer’s breast, and clasp at the altar a hand which had taken away a fellow-creature’s life! He had truly remarked that it was an easy thing to contrive a murder in one’s own room, and altogether a different matter to be brought face to face with it, as she was now; to be chained for life by marriage to a grim spectre, which would follow her everywhere, embodied in the presence of her husband! Human life was too long to endure such awful agony. She could never accept this offer, she thought, and yet it was absolutely necessary that this man, who was coming down upon her, should be removed. How could she do it? How could she secure

Emmerson's services without his society for life?

"Have you decided?" he asked, roughly, after waiting for some minutes.

She would promise and break it off afterwards, for he could not compel her to carry out her part of the agreement. This plan appeared to be a feasible one, and she determined upon carrying it into execution.

"I have decided," she replied, coldly, looking at him with cruel, glittering eyes; "remove this man, and I will marry you."

"Do not attempt to deceive me in any way," he said, plainly; "I will stand none of your devil's tricks. The hand that can remove a man can remove a woman also, and I should have no hesitation in doing so, if you play me false."

He would certainly be a nice stepfather to the gentle Maria!

"You had better not threaten me," she said, contemptuously; "I will carry out my part of the compact, but I will not listen to

vulgar threats. You must be civil, my dear friend.”

He knew from former experience that it was not wise to provoke her too far, and therefore he made no response. He would let her feel his power when they were married!

“We have settled about the price, then,” she observed; “we will now arrange how the thing is to be done. You must keep a strict look-out at Abernant, in order to meet him when he arrives. He must come through the town, because it is his most direct route, and he has no idea that he is in danger. You must follow him on his way, and when you have an opportunity—strike.”

“Why not do it near Abernant?” he asked; “the chance of detection would be much less.”

“I do not think so,” she replied; “a whole army might be killed amongst the hills, and no one be any the wiser. But that is not my only reason. Before I marry you, I must see his body with my own eyes.”

She was determined to put an end to rival claims once for all—to stamp them out for ever.

“Be it so ; it matters but little to me,” he replied, carelessly ; “there is one thing more before I go—how am I to recognize him ? ”

It was strange how carefully both avoided the mention of the doomed man’s name.

She rose, and going to her dressing-case unlocked it, and from one of the drawers she drew forth the photograph drawn upon glass, which she had shown to Maria. It was the portrait of a young and handsome man, about twenty-eight years old, with bright curly hair and a ruddy, pleasant face. He was somewhat shabbily attired, but his figure was a fine one, and his appearance highly prepossessing. Even Emmer-son, hardened as vice had made him, was touched.

“He looks a likely young man enough,” he said ; “he deserves a better fate than the one which is in store for him.”

“Sentimental again!” cried Mrs. Montessor, with a scornful laugh; “you are a great ass, after all, Henry.”

He did not reply, although he was irritated by her continual taunts; but he resolved to bide his time, and have a heavy reckoning with her when the opportunity came.

“Have you anything more to tell me?” he asked, coldly, as he rose to go.

“Yes, one point more,” she replied; “you wrote to say that young Hughes had been dismissed some days ago. What has become of him?”

“He is still in the town, with neither hopes nor plans for the future.”

“You can do anything with him, then?” she said; “he must be drawn into mischief, somehow. It is of the utmost importance that he should commit some offence against the law, and you must manage it.”

“I cannot,” he replied; “I tried to induce him to rob the old lawyer, but it was quite useless. The lad is a much better scamp than most of us.”

“He owed his uncle a debt of gratitude,” she observed; “he would not like on that account to injure him. He is differently situated now, and probably in a few days he will be at his wits’ ends for money. He must join you in this mur—in this little affair. He need know nothing about the particulars—tell him that a rich man from England is coming here to see me, and that you intend to relieve him of his gold. If you can, persuade him to fire the shot—supposing that you will use pistols, which will be the safest way. At all events, he must be an accomplice, and afterwards impressed with the fact that, if detected, he will be hung.”

He raised many objections to the plan, but she overruled them all. He did not wish, in fact, to have an accomplice in the business, and would have much preferred to execute the deed alone and unaided; but she insisted that he should act as she directed, and when he expressed his belief that trouble would arise in consequence, she said, roughly:—

“If trouble does arise, we can put him out of the way too.”

And with this decision he had to rest satisfied—or dissatisfied.

He went away immediately afterwards and the lady turned to a side-table, where several bottles were placed. She selected one of them containing brandy, and poured out nearly half a tumblerful—almost as much as Emerson had drunk—which she quaffed without adding a drop of water.

“Over proof,” she said, when she had drained the glass; “one needs a stimulant in a place like this world, where one has to be always fighting and struggling.”

She was fighting in real earnest now, and even the fiery spirit she had imbibed could not prevent a great sinking at her heart, as she recalled the dreadful compact she had made that night.

“If Maria only knew—if Mr. Danvers only knew,” she muttered, “how horrified they would be!”

Horried would have hardly represented their feelings, and it is an unmixed blessing that we cannot perceive the dark under-currents of each other's lives.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. DARBY UNBURDENS HIS GRIEFS.

THE lawyer had written to Mr. Danvers the day before Edward's dismissal, announcing the step which he had determined to take, and enclosing the proofs. Upon further consideration, however, he thought it unnecessary to send these latter papers, as Mr. Danvers could see them if he came over, as the lawyer had no doubt he would do. This letter, however, never reached its destination. The postal arrangements of the district were in the worst state possible, and it was impossible to trace a letter when it was lost. Whatever was the fate of this missive, it never reached the gentleman to whom it was addressed, and Frederick was therefore

unaware of the exposure which had taken place.

Neither did the unhappy youth write to confess his miserable plight. He could not nerve himself to announce his own disgrace to those who had loved and trusted him; and the first intimation Mr. Danvers received of what had occurred was in the shape of a rumour which reached the village, that young Hughes had left Abernant. Seriously uneasy, Frederick determined upon riding over; and when he presented himself in the lawyer's sanctum he was greatly dismayed to find that Edward had been dismissed, and that the old gentleman's letter announcing the fact had been lost. He was greatly pained and annoyed, and was at first inclined to vent his vexation upon the old gentleman.

"You dealt very hardly with him, sir," he said, reproachfully; "he might be a drunkard and a gambler, but he had not injured you; and he was your nephew—one of your own relations. But you turned him

adrift upon the world at a moment's notice."

"I had suffered enough from his irregularities before, sir," replied the old lawyer, stiffly. "He was my nephew, as you say, but he disgraced me and everybody connected with him. The bad feature in his case, and the one that irritated me the most, was the systematic deception he practised. We all thought that he was a changed and reformed character."

"True, it is hard to pardon a man for making a fool of us," replied Frederick, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice; "no one likes to acknowledge that another man is cleverer than he, even in deception."

"You are altogether mistaken, sir," said the lawyer, loftily; "there is nothing I abhor more than deceit, and chiefly because he was guilty of it I dismissed him. I detest so dark a side of human nature."

"You always see the brightest and best phase of men's characters, I suppose," remarked Frederick, with as near an approach to a sneer as he was capable of; "you are

not accustomed to make allowances for the weaknesses of human nature !”

“Such language is intolerable, sir,” said the lawyer, rising; “I consider that I have done my duty in this painful business, and I wish to hear no more about it. The young fellow has left the town, and I sincerely hope he will never return. I wish I had never seen him.”

This piece of intelligence heightened Frederick’s indignation and anxiety. “Left the town, has he?” said he, sternly, and rising also; “then you have the satisfaction of knowing, sir, that by precipitating matters as you have done, you have completed the ruin of this unhappy youth! He has not returned home, neither has he written a word to any one in Glynarth. For his sister’s sake you might have written to her or to me before adopting such extreme measures. I could almost express a wish that the mercy you have meted out to this erring, wretched boy, may be measured out to you.”

“I have done nothing, sir, to deserve this extraordinary language,” began the lawyer, angrily.

“If you can persuade yourself that you are blameless in the matter, it will be all the better for your peace of mind,” was the stern rejoinder. “You turn the lad away for going astray, and if you had done it in a proper manner, nobody could blame you; but you drove him to desperation: and let me ask you, what did you ever do to restrain him from his evil courses? Nothing, absolutely nothing. You paid him his salary, and looked after him during office hours; but when he was away from here, surrounded by those temptations which your common sense and experience of the world told you would surround him in one of the most fashionable towns of the Principality, you never endeavoured to guide him. Whatever may be his fate, sir—and I say it in the hope that in similar circumstances again you will act differently—his ruin is in some measure due to your negligence.”

He passed out without another word, whilst the lawyer sat down again and applied himself assiduously to work, in the hope of drowning the reproving voice of Conscience. He had been very careless and rather harsh, but it was now too late to remedy his mistake. Too late! How often this despairing cry meets us in life!

From the lawyer's office Mr. Danvers went to Edward's lodgings, and was told that the youth had left three days before, ostensibly for the purpose of returning to Glynarth; and the landlady was considerably astonished to find that he had never made his appearance there. He had been so depressed and melancholy before his departure, that she began to fear that he had committed suicide.

She suggested this to her visitor, and he recalled a despairing expression which Edward had made use of in their last interview. It was quite possible that in the depth of his despair he had committed this last crowning act of madness and folly.

His ride homewards was a gloomy one, for he knew not how to meet Annie with tidings like these. Could he but have known the real position in which Edward was at that moment, his sorrow would have been, if possible, heightened.

The youth was not dead. He was sitting in his room one evening, brooding over his troubles, and speculating upon the probable writer of the anonymous letter which had done him so much mischief, when Emmerson entered unannounced. He stood by Edward's side almost before the lad knew he was in the room, and laying his hand upon his shoulder, he said, cheerily—

“Rather down in the mouth, my boy, eh? Never say die! it won't help you, to look at things in a gloomy way.”

“It's all very well for you to talk in that way, Emmerson,” replied the youth sullenly; “who wouldn't be down in the mouth when he has had the sack as I have, and money is getting scarce?”

“Oh, you want money, do you?” said

his friend ; “ if that’s all it is easily remedied. I don’t mind helping a friend in need ; ” and as he spoke he flung six or seven sovereigns on the table—Mrs. Montessor’s gold, by the way.

Edward’s eyes glistened as he turned towards his friend.

“ You are the best of the lot, Emmerson,” he said, fervently ; “ not one of the others has been near me since I was dismissed, and for aught they know I might have starved. You have done differently, Emmerson, and I am immensely grateful.”

“ Don’t mention it, my dear fellow,” said the other deprecatingly ; “ I never like to see a man in trouble if I can help him out, and you can repay me if you like, when you are able.”

When would that be ? wondered Edward, and the shadow returned upon his face again. Emmerson was determined, however, not to allow it to remain there long.

“ Send out for a pint of brandy,” he said, putting down a half-sovereign ; “ and some

tobacco, too, at the same time. By Jove, we'll make a night of it!"

The articles in question were procured, and the two boon companions made a night of it. When the revelry was at its height, Emerson thought it time to introduce the subject which he wished to discuss.

"Now, look here, Hughes," he began, in a bluff, hearty way, "I am a fellow fond of my glass and pipe, and I don't care very much how I get them. Sometimes the way I adopt is not what people would call strictly honest, but I never care about that—a man must live! I manage to keep clear of the law—that is, in fact, the only article in my religion; and I get on famously with plenty of money at all times."

"You might get into trouble some time, though," said Edward, doubtfully.

"Of course it is just possible," admitted Emerson; "a man can't tell what may happen, but it isn't very likely; and even if I did, I should make myself scarce, and begin again in another part of the country."

A change of residence now and again is pleasant, although it is but seldom necessary, if one is moderately careful."

His statement was plausible and enticing, and it came at a moment when the lad was ready to do anything rather than return home.

"What kind of business do you undertake?" he asked, wishing to know a little more about the undertaking before committing himself to it. He was sober enough to know that there was danger connected with it, and that it behoved him to be careful.

"I have a little job in hand now, which will explain the whole thing to you," replied Emmerson, confidentially, drawing his chair nearer to the youth. "A man has landed in England lately from the gold-fields, and I have heard that he is going to Glynarth—your native place, by the way—to visit a Mrs. Montessor, whom I presume you also know."

Edward nodded wisely. Emmerson, of course, was not supposed to know the lady.

“ Well, I have an idea of waylaying him on the hills, and relieving him of his valuables,” pursued Emmerson, with a wink at his victim, who was drinking heavily; “ he is rich enough, I believe, to part with a little for our support; and if we left him unmolested, I have no doubt he would make a wrong use of the money, so that it is only common charity to lighten his burden.”

Edward laughed a hollow, bitter laugh, that would have made his sister shudder.

“ When we have taken our booty, we will go for a trip to England, and see what can be picked up. We will make a first-rate living, old fellow. Will you join? ”

He was more than half intoxicated, and was also driven to desperation. What did he care what became of him?

“ Yes, I don’t mind if I do,” he said, in a reckless manner. “ I can’t be any worse off than I am now, and I may be better. In any case it doesn’t matter.”

And so the poor deluded victim of a foul conspiracy walked into the snare set

for him. If he had but known that this sleek, smooth-tongued friend of his had actually written the anonymous letter to the lawyer, he might have been more careful, and less ready to trust him. But in his ignorance he sealed his own doom. It was arranged that he should leave Abernant on the following morning, and should accompany Emmerson to a cottage which he occupied in the country, where he might remain until he was wanted. He was in this place at the very moment when Frederick was inquiring about him in the town.

Tired and unrefreshed, Mr. Danvers rose from his sleepless couch, on the morning after his visit to Abernant, and set out to walk down to the Glyn. It was useless, he thought, to conceal the real state of affairs from Annie, for she would hear in time, and perhaps from unfriendly lips.

Once more he met Mr. Darby coming along the road in his usual contemplative manner. He had given up persecuting Annie with his attentions, but he loved to

wander in the direction of the spot hallowed by her presence; and it was a favourite practice of his to climb the hill overlooking her home, and gaze with rapt attention for hours on the tiles of the roof which protected her. Here, also, he was wont to rehearse his sermons at the top of his voice, in the vain hope that some stray fragment of his eloquence might occasionally reach her. It was a delusive hope, however; for the hill was so high that it would require an extremely powerful pair of lungs to make the owner audible in the house below.

He was returning from one of these periodical excursions, and as he had heard of the rumoured engagement between Annie and Mr. Danvers, he was somewhat embarrassed at the meeting.

He concealed his confusion, however, by his usual philosophical stratagem.

“It is a curious and extraordinary fact, sir,” he began, “a very curious and extraordinary fact, that men congregate in the ugliest spots they can find. Whenever the

scenery happens to be a little more romantic than ordinary, the population falls off, and in the spots which are the paradises of the world there are scarcely any inhabitants. You have travelled considerably, I believe, sir, and are aware that such is the fact? ”

“ It is undoubtedly true, that nearly all the great cities of the world are not remarkable for the beauty of their sites; but it must be remembered that their sites were chosen, not because of their beauty, but because of their convenience and because they were adapted for the purpose to which they were applied. I see nothing more in the fact than that men prefer utility to beauty.”

“ I am not satisfied with your explanation, sir,” replied Mr. Darby, shaking his head with a profound air; “ it might account for the fact that cities are generally erected upon unattractive sites, but it does not explain the almost perfect solitudes in which nature’s most beautiful scenes are found. To my mind, it proves that in the majority

of cases there is a natural leaning in the human mind towards ugliness.”

“Men could not always earn their livelihood amidst romantic scenery,” observed Frederick, who was amused at this pondering over trivial subjects, which presented no difficulties to ordinary persons, but was nevertheless anxious to shake him off, that he might proceed to his destination. “We cannot live upon æsthetics, Mr. Darby.”

“No; but æsthetics may render life sweeter and more enjoyable,” returned the minister, “only people refuse to believe it. They are content to spend their lives in the first hole into which they may happen to drop, and hundreds of well-to-do people, who might live anywhere, go in summer to visit the beautiful scenes of the world, and feign raptures and intense enthusiasm, which they prove by hurrying away as fast as possible. It is simply a natural taste for the ugly, sir.”

“It may be so,” replied Mr. Danvers; “it is at least a very interesting subject, but I have really no time to discuss it further

now. I must wish you good morning, Mr. Darby."

He went on his way, and in a few minutes was telling the sad story of Edward's humiliation and disappearance to the sister who had hoped so much from him, and latterly had begun to believe in him. This was indeed a bitter awakening—one of the great shocks we have to meet in life. And she was so weak and feeble to bear it, so despairing in the presence of a blow which came so suddenly and so crushingly!

In the meantime Mr. Darby pursued the tenor of his way towards Glynarth, and instead of entering the village as he was accustomed to do, he made his way to Montessor House. He was about to build a small school-room in connection with his chapel, and he called upon his patroness, Mrs. Montessor, for a subscription.

She received him very graciously. As a Unitarian, there was a delightful tinge of heterodoxy about him which commended him to the lady's notice. She had a *penchant*

for forbidden fruit, like her ancestress Eve, and, like her, she was destined to get into trouble through her weakness. When he had explained his errand, and pocketed a subscription, she offered him some refreshments, which he thankfully accepted. It was not every day that he fed upon choice viands such as were found on Mrs. Montessor's sideboard.

"You are not looking very well, Mr. Darby," she remarked, as she poured out a glass of wine. "I fear the air of Glynarth does not agree with your constitution."

"Ah, madam!" he replied, sadly, "it is not that. Bodily I am very well, but the mind, as Sallust says, '*dux atque imperator vitæ mortalium*,' the director and ruler, madam, of the lives of mortals. My mind is not well, Mrs. Montessor."

"Dear me! what is the matter with it?" asked Maria, who chanced to come in as he was making the remark. "What is the matter with it, Mr. Darby?"

"Circumstances over which I had no con-

trol"—and here he heaved a deep sigh—"these made me unhappy—very unhappy," he added, emphatically, as if he gloated over his own imaginary misery. "I am a hopeless wanderer on the face of the earth now, Mrs. Montessor."

"How very sad!" exclaimed Maria, preparing, nevertheless, to leave the room; for she was not inclined, like her mother, to patronize this would-be philosopher. "I hope you will confine your wanderings to Glynarth, Mr. Darby. It would be a sad thing if you went astray, and lost yourself in this world of sin and sorrow, that you are so fond of abusing."

"Maria thought you were joking," said the lady, when her daughter had left the room; "she did not understand that you were in earnest, and I am sure you were."

Maria's banter had wounded Mr. Darby's dignity. Like many other great men, he could not endure ridicule, even in its mildest form; and Mrs. Montessor saw his uneasiness during her daughter's speech.

“Miss Montessor has not yet had stern experience of the world, and her young affections have not been blighted, as mine have been,” he said plaintively. “We live in a very hard, pitiless world, Mrs. Montessor; and men of mind, like myself, have no chance against men of action, who study only the world and its ways. We are constantly shelved by them.”

“I am sorry to hear that your hopes, whatever they might be, have been, as you say, blighted,” she replied, gravely. “I should not think it possible to meet with a serious disappointment in Glynarth. May I ask who the young lady was? But perhaps she does not reside here.”

The lady was, in fact, beginning to fear that he had fallen in love with her daughter. The presumption of these low radical fellows, she thought, is something dreadful; and although she might praise and flatter him, and extol his virtues in public, it was quite another thing when he fell in love with her daughter—supposing him to have done so.

Mr. Darby, however, had not done so.

“The young lady does reside here,” he replied, solemnly; “and it cuts me to the heart to see her, day after day, and yet feel that she is beyond my reach. She refused me flatly and decisively, and that not once, nor twice, only.”

“It was very good of you to make her so many offers,” said Mrs. Montessor, who had an idea as to who the young lady was; “most men find one refusal enough, without being trailed in the dust a second time.”

“Miss Hughes refused me flatly, as I said before,” he remarked, unconsciously revealing her name; but the lady did not manifest any surprise; “and yet I offered her a good home, a place in society as the wife of a minister and a philosopher; and last, but not least, a salary of seventy pounds a-year. It is not an offer she will meet with every day.”

“It is certainly a little strange that she should be so blind to her own interests,”

remarked the lady, wishing to draw him on to expatiate on the theme.

“She is no born aristocrat,” he went on; “her family is a plebeian one; and if she married she would have ascended higher in the social scale than any of her relations ever succeeded in doing. Besides, it is not given to every woman to be the helpmeet of a gifted and great man!”

“True; but then it is not always easy to decide as to whether everybody is gifted who wishes to be regarded as such;” and Mrs. Montessor curled her lip as she thought, that if the specimen before her was a gifted and great man, she would prefer not to be mated to such a man.

“Did she assign any reason, Mr. Darby, for her most inexplicable conduct?” asked Mrs. Montessor, sympathizingly.

“None whatever; but I am afraid it is clear enough now what her reason was. She had set her cap at this rich, clever Englishman, who, I admit, is a very good fellow, and would have, I thought, more

sense than to be entrapped by the arts of a simple country girl.”

“But those arts captivated you, Mr. Darby,” she said, maliciously; “and you are a greater man than Mr. Danvers, you know. If you succumbed, how could he hope to escape?”

This was a somewhat difficult question to answer, and Mr. Darby evaded it.

“I do not know whether their rumoured engagement is a fact or not,” he said, wholly ignoring the point she had made. “I do know, however, that it has caused me a great deal of unhappiness, and blighted my young life.”

To most people it would have been amusing to hear him talk thus; but Mrs. Montessor was too much occupied with a scheme—indistinct and dim as yet, it is true—which was forming itself in her mind, to enable her to make use of this man’s foolish passions for the furtherance of her own views and objects. She regarded everything, in

fact, from this point of view, of her own self-interest.

“You should not despair yet, Mr. Darby,” she said, with apparent kindness and sympathy; “she is not married yet, and I am convinced she never will be to this gentleman. He is altogether unsuited for her, and I have a conviction that the match will not come off.”

“That would not improve my case,” he responded, gloomily; “she would not accept me if she missed him.”

“Not at once, perhaps; but she would in time, when she found herself in danger of becoming an old maid,” said Mrs. Montresor, encouragingly; “you men are always in such a hurry, and in your haste you spoil everything. One would imagine, from your haste in courtship, that married life was to be very brief indeed; and that you were anxious not to lose any more of its delights than you can well help.”

She spoke sarcastically, almost bitterly. She had no sympathy with love, and the

doubts and fears it causes; for she had never really loved any one except herself, and she could not understand the vagaries caused by the tender passion.

“Do not create false hopes in my breast—hopes that can never be realized, madam,” he exclaimed, in a tragic manner; “life has lost its sweetness, and it can never return, for *she* will never be anything to me—not even a friend. Ah! I am very miserable and unhappy, notwithstanding my philosophy and my seventy pounds a-year.”

He was in sober earnest, although she could hardly believe it. He really considered himself an exceptionally favoured mortal. If we could all take a similar view, the world would be a much more cheerful place than it is at present.

“My dear Mr. Darby, you ought not to be so despondent,” said Mrs. Montessor, with her most winning manner. “I think that in time I can promise you the bride you have set your heart upon. But you must not be impatient, Mr. Darby; you

must wait, and keep aloof from her. Do not trouble her with unwelcome attentions which she might not like."

"But if she is to be my wife they ought not to be unwelcome attentions," he persisted.

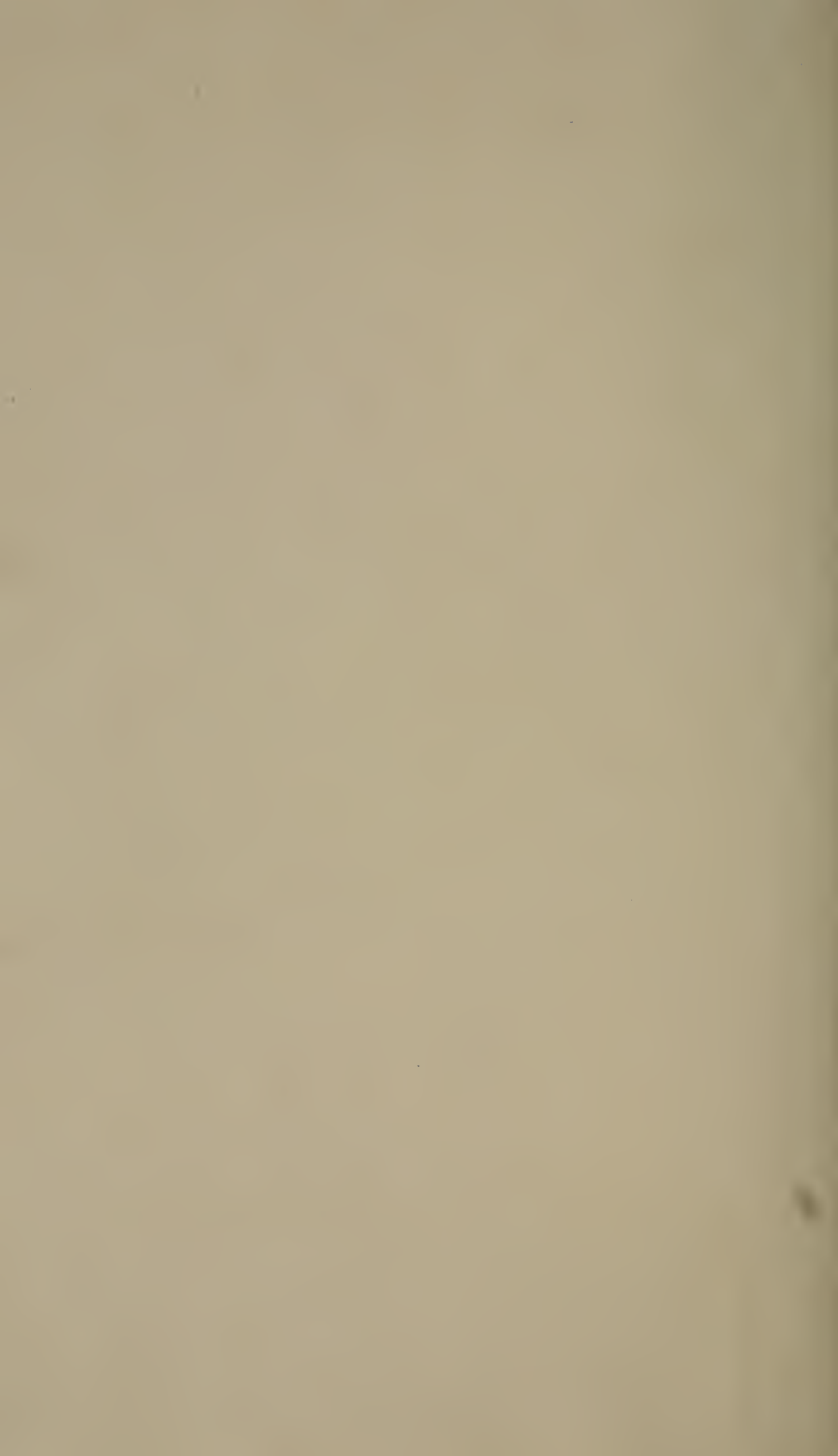
"Never mind all that just now," she replied; "leave the matter in my hands, and I will arrange it satisfactorily for you."

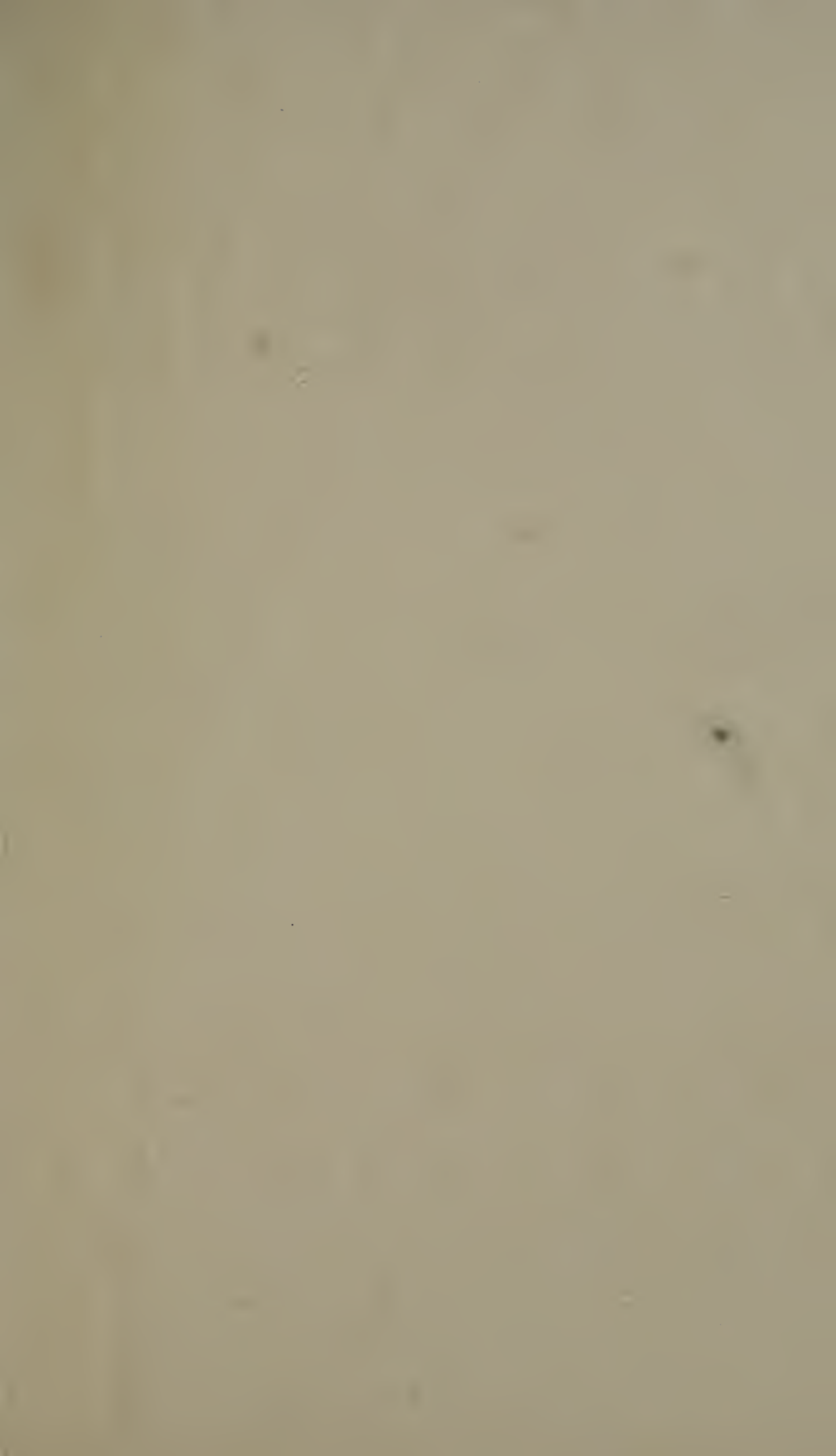
So it came to pass that the Reverend Mr. Darby left Montessor House greatly cheered by the lady's assurances. He had no conception of the way in which she proposed to set to work, neither did he care, provided the result was the bending of Annie Hughes to his will. Mr. Darby's love, like that of most people, was a very selfish passion.

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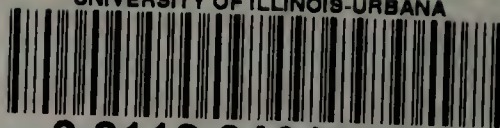
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